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AGASTO'S
DAUGHTER
A ROMANCE OF
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



PAUL H. BLADES



DON SAGASTO' DAUGHTER

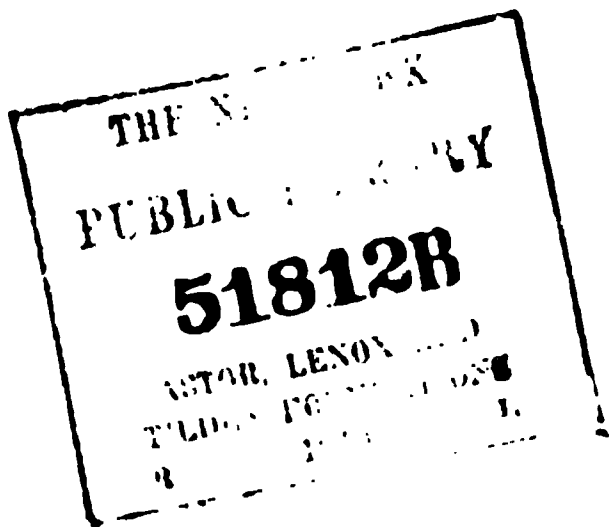
A Romance of Southern California

PAUL HARCOURT BLADES



RICHARD G. BADGER
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PREFACE

This story relates to a period believed by the author not to have been dealt with commensurately in California fiction. It has to do with what may be termed the final transition period—the passing of the Spaniard, the financial conquest of Spanish California expressed in the construction of the first overland railroad, cementing the political acquisition, the years from 1870 to 1885.

The story aspires to be in its way something of a photograph of the higher type of the older Spanish families, a most interesting people who once owned great possessions in Southern California.

The story also has to do in a way with the high character that marked the careers of most of the devoted men whose zeal for Rome and Christianity should never be forgotten.



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DON SAGASTO'S DAUGHTER

CHAPTER I

The Slopes of San Fernando

WILL senor have the wine here or in the hunting room?"

"I will have it here, Tizza; and bring water!"

"Yes, senor." Tizza was moving to obey.

"And, Tizza," called the senor, "where is the senorita?"

"The senorita rode to the Orquez ranch awhile ago, senor. I think she will come soon. Does senor know there is much trouble?"

"Yes, I know, Tizza. That is all. Fetch the wine!" Don Sagasto drew a large rawhide-bottomed porch chair to a table kept for ready service in the shade and air on the big broad veranda built along the east, south and west faces of the hacienda residence. He tossed his peaked and ornate sombrero back against the adobe wall of the house, rolled and lit a cigarette, and let his eye range over his estate and across the valley to the easy treeless skyline curves of the hills ten miles beyond, southwestward. Landward, across that tawny barrier, as delicately undulating as the contour of a recumbent Venus, extending from the southern stem of the valley northwestward seven

leagues or more till their shoulders bended to catch the splash of the ocean, the unforgettable softness of sea-breath exhaled into San Fernando valley and filled every living thing with the very ecstasy of life.

Don Sagasto, the master, loved the sea-born balsam and the valley fragrance, loved to bare his head to the caressing current, loved to fill his great lungs with those dallying health-draughts that tempered the summer heat; he loved the miracles of Southern California mornings that reveal their superlative glories only to matriculates in nature-harmony, and who uncover before the pageantry of those mountain purples and sun-spun golds. He looked long across the green and shimmering miles to where the line of vision was arrested by the hills that define the western boundary of the great barony of wheat that once had been his father's, and most of which still belonged to him.

Tizza came, soft-footed as a cat, and put the wine of the senor's making on the table before him, and soft-footed slipped away.

The don drank one great draught, then more in intermittent sips, with his masterful dark eyes ever on that spread of ripening, even, murmuring wheat.

The previous year had been a dry one and the crop scant, but December, February and March rains were abundant again, and the upper and central San Fernando harvest would be Nilefully plenteous. It was good to see, and it pleased the Don Sagast lord of a diminishing principality, and last progeni of his illustrious name.

A fine hound bounded around from the shade the dwelling, barked deeply, admonishingly, irrogatingly, with head aloft and tail up-ar



Dogs were almost as indigenous to Southern California ranchos in the early days as the scampering ground-squirrels, and they are quite as appertenant today; sometimes amiable thoroughbreds that made the wayfarer feel them to be co-extendors of hospitality with their masters, if he passed their quick and sniffy vising of his credentials; but oftentimes—more times indeed—mere pestilent brutes of no degree or quality. But Sagasto's pack were a high-born lot, befitting the master's station. In that period antedating the railroad in Southern California travelers were infrequent at the haciendas, save at such as aligned the sinuous "El Camino Real," the King's Highway, designed by pioneering padres to connect the mission properties from San Diego to "Yerba Buena," and the barking of a dog in the daytime usually advised the household of an approach.

Don Sagasto's establishment faced the south, as most of the early Southern California residences were built. South and east beyond the shoulder of a hill lay the site of the future village, and rather to the west of south the still considerable building of San Fernando mission. The senor turned from his eye-feast of wheat-miles to look where the hound was pointing. A horseman was leisurely trotting up the lane that led from the stage road past the mission, noting a fine old orange grove on the right, a mighty vineyard on his left, and gratefully enjoying the shade of huge and spreading peppers that formed a long and noble arcade up to the residence.

Another hound leaped to the front, then still others joined the chorus of warning and interrogation, till the don spoke.

"Oton! Temblor! Have done!" And the splendid pack quite comprehending that the master was meaning "it is all right, my captains, I am here; thank you for your services, but I am here, you see," stopped barking and squatted solemnly upon their haunches, looking intently at the approaching horseman with frequent up-turnings to the master for possible commands.

As the rider neared the veranda the hounds started briskly forward, Temblor leading, tails straight and stiff as arrows, eyes mandatory but without menace or treachery. Don Sagasto arose and stepped forward, the stranger saluted in military fashion, dismounted and led his animal toward the bareheaded master of the hacienda.

"Good afternoon, senor," said the stranger.

"Good afternoon, sir," replied the don.

"Are you Don Cristobal Sagasto?"

"Yes, that is my name."

"My name is Hemperton, senor, Wayne Hemperton. I have come to have a business conversation with you, if you can give the time?"

"Certainly, Mr. Hemperton, certainly. I am glad to see you, sir, you are entirely welcome. I will call a servant to take your horse."

As the senor and Hemperton shook hands the stranger observed that his host had a strong grasp, and that his clear, dark eyes, so blue they were nearer black, looked straight at him.

The don walked to the west end of the corral and called "Manuel! Roberto! Somebody—you—come here!" Then after a pause far, they cannot hear. I will send the dog to the corral."

"Oh, never mind, senor, I can tie here, and I shall be returning presently."

"No, sir, you must not think of it. Strangers are welcome at my house. We let no one go without partaking of our hospitality. It is not much, but you shall have wine and fruit. No, you must not think of going until you have had wine. Here—Tizza! Tizza!"

"Yes, senor!"

"Where are my servants? Find some one at once and say I bid him come. Say that I command that the senor's horse be cared for. Go! Tizza, do you understand? Mr. Hemperton, tie your horse at this post, and my vaqueros will attend to him. Now, come into the house, or perhaps you would prefer to remain here on the veranda, in the air. It is not hot, but wine will refresh you after your long ride. It is more pleasant, you may find, here where you can look over the valley."

"You are very kind, Don Sagasto. I am rather thirsty. I came from Los Angeles since noon." The don had placed a chair for his guest at the table, and with courtly gesture invited him to be seated.

"I will have more wine. Here, Tizza!—oh, I forgot, she is not there. Miguel! Tomaso! Well, have all my attendants deserted me? Pardon, Mr. Hemperton, I will go for the wine myself."

"Senor, do not take the trouble," Hemperton began, but the don had disappeared. Hemperton removed his hat, a broad white sombrero fashioned in reduced imitation of the picturesque Mexican head-wear common to the region, laid it on the floor, ran his fingers through his hair and inhaled chestful after chestful of the mellow Pacific breeze, craving its soft narcomatous fragrance.

The hounds had gathered in an inquisitive bunch near the veranda, amiably watching the stranger, sedately awaiting developments, altogether satisfied inasmuch as the master had extended his welcome, and apparently assuming that they were as a matter-of-course to play their part, as high-bred dogs should, in the entertainment of the master's guest.

Hemperton leaned forward, held out a hand and called to them. They approached a few steps, looking at him, but none nearer except Temblor, a splendid black-and-tan specimen, the evident leader, with an eye like a beautiful woman's. Temblor sedately advanced to Hemperton, looking him in the eye as the master had, sniffed a sniff or two, looked up into his face again; and, without either wagging tail or otherwise manifesting interest favorable or unfriendly, as sedately turned away, walked to the outer edge of the pack and flattened his huge and sinewy length on the ground.

Senor Sagasto reappeared with a bottle and glasses.

"Now, Mr. Hemperton, you must have some of my aged wine. The vines of San Fernando are among the oldest in California. Wine has been made here since the days of Padre Lasuen, who founded the mission which you see yonder, more than three score and ten years ago."

Filling both glasses, half with wine and half with spring water cooled in an olla, the don raised the beverage and said:

"I give you greeting and welcome, Mr. Hemperton."

"I drink my thanks for your hospitable reception, Don Sagasto."

"It pleases me, sir, to receive visitors at my rancho. Notwithstanding the King's Highway from the south to the upper missions is not far from my house, not many come to us. Years ago when the mission hospice was maintained travelers were frequent. However, our friends in the pueblo honor us with their presence occasionally. You say you have come from the pueblo?"

"Yes, senor, I have made my headquarters there during the past few weeks. I am attending to some right-of-way matters for the railroad company, and I have been directed by the company's attorney to call upon you regarding the right-of-way through your property."

At the mention of "railroad" the fine face of Don Sagasto clouded a trifle, and his eyes turned broodingly across the valley. After a reflective pause he asked:

"What do you desire to know, Mr. Hemperton?"

"Senor, the company wishes me to finish the details of the right-of-way across your rancho. I am to complete the right-of-way through to San Gorgonio pass, working down from San Fernando. The big tunnel will be pierced in a short time and tracklaying will then be hurried through this valley."

"I told the company what I would do, Mr. Hemperton, months ago. But the company wants too much. Why should I donate the entire right-of-way? I offered half. Yet I am by no means sure I shall be so much benefited by this road. I and my people have always fared well enough without a railroad. I am satisfied. We are a peaceful and a prosperous people in this region. We haul our grain to San Pedro, or sometimes only to El

Pueblo. Our market is a good one, and not difficult to reach. I am not sure that the road would be a material advantage. Still, I do not set myself against it. I only ask that the company pay me. But the company insisted that I donate the entire right-of-way, five miles. That is too much, Mr. Hemperton! That is too much to ask!"

"Senor, I understand you have considerable property in the town?"

"I have some—yes."

"Do you not think it will greatly increase in value when the road is running between the pueblo and San Francisco, and especially when it is in operation through to the east?"

"No, I do not think so. This is primarily a grain and stock country, Mr. Hemperton. It was never intended for anything else. I know there are Americans in the pueblo who believe that place will become a city—perhaps forty thousand, maybe fifty thousand people. But I tell them they are mistaken. The company is imprudent to build a railroad across the Colorado desert and into Arizona. There will be no business for a railroad in that region. This country will not sustain a large population. The water supply is insufficient. We can reach the city in three days or less from San Pedro. We ship our grain and our wool and our wine by steamer—why should we desire the railroad?"

"Senor, I am surprised that you do not see the advantage that will follow the building of the road. Have you ever visited the eastern part of the United States?"

"Yes; once I traveled through many of your

eastern cities when I returned from Spain. I voyaged from Barcelona to New York; that was—let me recall—perhaps ten years ago. I came west as far as Chicago, then I returned to New York and sailed to Panama and up to San Pedro. You cannot do in this country what you have done in the east. This will not be a general business country; it is only for grain and wine and stock. Your great schemers, they will fail—they will go to ruin if they try to build too much out here!”

“Senor, I cannot agree with you. I think the railroad will make great developments in this region.”

“Well, sir, if your people expect their railroad to make this region so valuable, why should they not be willing to pay a fair price for the right-of-way?” exclaimed Sagasto.

“Senor, I am authorized to say that the company will pay you for half the desired right-of-way, if you will deed the entire right through the rancho.”

The senor reflected a moment. “That is better, Mr. Hemperton, but it is hardly enough. Still I may consent. I will advise you tomorrow. If you are not too tired I would be pleased to conduct you around a portion of my estate. You must remain with us tonight. Let us ride for an hour, then supper will be ready.”

Hemperton declared he was not fatigued. He would be pleased to ride with the senor. Sagasto said: “With your permission we will walk to the corral, and on the way you will see my winery.”

Just then he glanced down the pepper arcade. “Here comes my daughter,” he exclaimed, “let us wait.”

They walked from the veranda as the senorita rode briskly up to the house. Seeing a stranger with her father she would have turned to the left to dismount on the north side, but the senor called

"Felicia. Come to me, princesa."

The don advanced, helped her to dismount, kissed her, patted the sleek and shining bay, and taking his daughter's small brown hand turned toward the guest.

"Senor Hemperton, this is my daughter."

Mr. Hemperton bowed.

Felicia extended her hand. "Guests are welcome, senor."

It was a warm, soft hand, its clasp surprisingly firm for a shy little sequestered senorita, Hemperton thought, and the eyes that looked straight into his were clear and dark and unafraid.

Hemperton swiftly glanced from father to daughter and measured the likeness of them, and caught that brief inspirational flash something of that extreme and rather extraordinary sympathy, devotion and interdependence.

"Felicia, Senor Hemperton and I will ride an hour. Come, Mr. Hemperton, we will go for horses." Then stopping he turned again to his daughter, "Felicia, how is Juan Orquez?"

"He is badly hurt, father; the doctor says he will not live. Father Leon was there, and will be in the morning."

"Take wine to Senor Orquez, my daughter, anything else that may be needed. If I can help, let me know."

"Yes, father."

The don explained that a neighbor

tenant of his, Orquez, who dwelt on a small ranch up there toward the tunnel, had been injured by dynamite used in blasting. The company had so far refused to do anything for him. One arm had been blown off near the shoulder. "Your company, Mr. Hemperton, is not making many friends in this vicinity, though I understand the people in the pueblo are much rejoiced over the prospect of the completion of the road."

"I am sorry, senor. Perhaps I may be able to cause some help to be extended," but he said it without much heartiness or interest, so it seemed to the don.

Hemperton bowed again to the senorita, and the men walked away. At the rear of the great quadrangle they found half a dozen dependents.

"Well!" exclaimed the don, "where have you been, you idlers? Not one was here when wanted." His tone was not harsh, however, and Hemperton read in their manner and expression affectionate regard for the master.

"The senorita's bay is waiting, in front; attend to it, one of you."

Hemperton had arrived in Southern California but a few weeks before, yet he had fallen completely under the magic of the wondrous air and color, the wooing softness of the days and the witchery of the nights. From the very hour of his disembarking at San Pedro the indescribable charm of the region had quite possessed him, and day after day he surrendered more and more to its allurements. It was a land a-dreaming still, and he sometimes wondered if its languor might not narcotize his inherent down-east force and smother the fire of his

energy. If its softness had not yet saturated the American population, might it not sooner or later devitalize him and them, inoculate all Saxon blood with the listlessness, forcelessness and apathy of the semi-tropics, and quench the fires of accomplishment in the character of American oncomers? Would the serene insidious spirit of contentment that brooded over the face of things eat into his Saxon vigor, and the vigor of the thousands yet to come, and make of the conquering Americans a race of dreamers and procrastinators like the races of the south, like the don and the peons who had succeeded the padres; or would the Yankee force typefied in the locomotives that were even then breaking forever upon the slumbers of the sprawling San Joaquin beyond the tunnel and soon would noisily proclaim the end of the long reign of solitude and sleep in these silent valleys,—would this Yankee energy conquer and dominate the spirit of this old New Spain as it had mastered the arms of this old New Spain's dispossessed possessors?

Such speculations had occupied Hemperton much in the course of his comings and goings in and about the valleys, and they swept through his mind again as he walked with Senor Sagasto around the sun-baked quadrangle under the lace-like canopy of ancient peppers past the wine-house to the corral. Straight north from the corral the rancho inclined, easily undulating, upward toward the low unfoliated mountains, through whose flint and exsiccated backbone the indomitable will of railway financiers had driven the more than a mile-long tunnel to bolt this oasised empire fast to the world of men.

On those sunny foothills ranging westward toward

the sea grazed the fat herds of the senor's sheep. Hemperton could see a great gray lot of them well up on the slope, the westering sun throwing them into clear relief against the green vesture of the hills.

The senor had ordered the animals made ready, but Hemperton was so lost in the dreamy languid beauty of the landscape and its vesperian colorings that he started when the don said: "If you please, we will ride now, Mr. Hemperton."

They cantered along the rancho vineyard straight west and south. West and south spread those miles of wheat, sloping almost imperceptibly toward the sink of the valley where the thin clear thread of the river rippled over a broad bed of almost bottomless sand to the pueblo of Our Lady of the Angels away in the south around the great fortress of a hill that rises abrupt and defending at the very gateway of the San Fernando.

Turning to the left the don pointed to a road narrowing away southwest. "That," said he, "leads away off there to Cahuenga pass over which your General Fremont traveled to the pueblo hills."

"I suppose," he continued, after a pause, "your American people will take possession of this country, in the end. I do not want to see it, but it is your way. I belong to the old regime, and I would prefer that the old regime should continue during my lifetime. But the Americans will take it all."

"Yes," replied Hemperton, "I believe this will be a busy region." And he was thinking there would be opportunities for landless and acquisitive men like himself.

The sun was slipping from an orange sky to light

another people beyond many waters, scattering opalescent splendors from crest to crest of the lofty range that guarded the valley's eastern line, and bronzy little Mexican and Indian children looked bronzier still in the evening light as the horsemen ambled past half a dozen of them squatted in the roadside dust near the gray-brown mission walls, nearing the umbrated lane that led back to the rancho residence. The hounds bounded frolicsomenely toward the master. Dismounting he stooped to stroke a silken ear, pat a lifted head, or scratch a willing back. Temblor, as became the leader upon whom devolved responsibility for the good behavior and general high repute of the pack, trotted up, barked confidingly and with manner and tone that said as plainly as words "Any orders for the night, master?"—set the rest a very staid and proper example of dog decorum.

A peon led the horses away.

Calling Tomaso, major domo by right of priority of service, the don directed him to conduct Hemperton to the traveler's room. "And presently the evening meal will be served. My servants and such accommodations as we possess are yours to command, Mr. Hemperton," said the don, with a stately bow.

The Sagasto mansion, a great square adobe pile, one-storied and sturdy, was built after the Spanish and Mexican fashion of the more pretentious country homes—around a considerable court or patio, thick walls whitened inside and out, the roof red-tiled and heavy.

In the center of the patio grew a large live oak, one of a very few that embellished the San Fernando region. The house had been erected by the father

of Sagasto, old General Romero Sagasto, who had fought under General Santa Ana; and who, when the American arms were triumphant, had migrated with his family from Chihuahua to the estate which the Mexican government had years before given to him—in what is now Southern California—as reward for heroic and distinguished service.

General Sagasto had come to Mexico from the province of Castile, head of a family illustrious in Spanish annals, a confidant and advisor of his king, stately, stern, a patriot, a soldier, entrusted with a special message to the Mexican authorities. The picturesque and turbulent country interested and fascinated him and he had tendered his experience and his sword to the government. Sheer love of adventure drove him into the unknown north, to see for himself what manner of a grant it was that had been conferred upon him in the Alta California, whither the padres had pioneered before. The general had founded a home on the San Fernando grant and there established himself dictator over a scant but servile people, the recognized leader even among the foremost of his race scattered over California, until after this New Spain had been admitted into the Union that wrested it from its ancient ownership, grimly unreconciled to the treaty which gave the imperial region to Americans. As years wore on, the intensity of his dislike of everything American increased, and deeding the entire hacienda to his only son Cristobal, the defiant old Castilian returned to Chihuahua, a warrior in spirit to the last.

The room to which Hemperton was conducted was an apartment designated the “traveler’s room”

in all establishments of consequence owned by Spanish dons, and reserved for the especial comfort of infrequent comers and goers. When the California missions were builded for the Spanish crown by pious padres for proselyting and civilizing centers for Indian neophytes, each of the twenty-one mission edifices from San Diego to the northernmost at Sonoma, including the mission of San Fernando, had its "traveler's room"—and there was a "traveler's orchard," moreover, specially inclosed and protected and cultivated for the refreshment and delectation of wayfarers. In the mission days there were no other lodging places than the mission hospices, where the thrifty fathers presided with the undisputed authority of governors until Mexico issued her despoiling edict of secularization. When the dons came in the footsteps of the padres and built their great adobe domiciles on grants of princely areas, they also set aside a "traveler's room" in each establishment, and every don's mansion was dispenser of the most unquestioning hospitality for which no man could pay. The room to which Hemperton was conducted was large, cool and white; the floor—bare and clean as a fresh dinner plate—was rugged with bear skins. On the table some one—Hemperton wondered if it were the senorita of the small hand—had placed a welcoming bunch of exquisite roses of Castile which he had observed blooming in many-colored profusion on the west side of the house. In this room, as in the "traveler's room" in all houses of the dons, was a small altar with a statue of the Virgin, freshly wreathed with white roses.

The room faced west. He could see under the

peppers beyond that beguiling field of roses—across the vineyard, far westward to the hills diaphanous in the brief California twilight.

It would be pleasant indeed, he thought, to be the owner of such a property as this. Some day when the railroad was in operation, this magnificent rancho would be worth a fortune, far greater than the fine old don, his host, then remotely imagined.

Hemperton was appetant for money. He wanted property. This undeveloped country would be the place to acquire both, with the awakening at hand, the awakening in which he would play a part—a place for the making, and to—forget. These languorous courtly old Spaniards but scantily appreciated their opportunities. It would not be difficult, he believed, to buy some of their choicest possessions at very low prices. The don himself, quite the premier don of the several fine old Spaniards he had met in the course of his official wanderings through the valleys; perhaps the don himself would sell a part of this princely domain? Clearly he did not welcome the genesis of the Yankee invasion, but Hemperton flattered himself that he had made at least a favorable impression on Sagasto, and that might open the way to profitable association. Hemperton had not yet the means to purchase, but he meant to have. He proposed to be rich. A way would be found. These lands would inevitably pass from the Spaniards and he would contrive to get a portion. Fifty, yes, a hundred years hence, if left in possession these ceremonious but impractical Spaniards would still be raising wheat, and nursing grudges against Americans for their dispossession of Mexico.

Then he heard a bell announce the evening meal. He stepped out upon the veranda as the senor came around the corner from the front. The host conducted him across the court, under the gnarled and ancient live-oak, to the dining-hall which, like his chamber, was snowy white, but larger. On the table, spread spotless as the spotless walls, were wine and olives, more of those fragrant roses, and a heaping dish of oranges. Hemperton wanted to ask, when Tizza bore in piles of chicken and berries, if only the three—the senor, the senorita and himself—were all. Was there not a wife and mother? Were there only the two, the lordly don and his beautiful daughter? Were they the sole possessors of this manorial hacienda, the sole dispensers of this simple but unconditioned hospitality? But he did not ask, somehow he could not, and the host made no reference to an absent member.

Only the magisterial don and his lovely daughter! However did it happen? This beauty sitting there confronting him, with the air of a princess but wholly gracious and winning, the Senorita Sagasto, with the great dark eyes and the refined pure Castilian face, and the shapely hand browned by sun and air! However had it happened that he had not observed her surpassing loveliness when she came riding up the pepper-lane to the veranda that afternoon, reigning there in solitude with none to see in this stately old establishment, twenty miles from people! Her attire entirely white, a pink rose of Castile below her throat, her luxuriant black hair braided into a single plait touching her waist, her figure just rounding into womanhood, neither full nor slender, a face and shapeliness efflorescent with

health and wholesome girlhood—however did it happen that he had not seen it all before? Whence came that radiation of exquisite refinement, that manner of one born high and nobly reared, yet blending with the unrestraint and atmosphere of this great solitary mystic west?

Social contact, even had the senorita dwelt among the most cultivated in that little town clinging to the hills yonder, could not of itself account for her surpassing and unstudied poise. Hemperton had heard, casually, that the Sagasto family were proud and lineaged, but none had informed him that the grandfather of the don had been a grandee of Spain and a companion of his sovereign. He did not know that the senorita's blood and breeding traced back through centuries of men of valor and degree, and of dames who graced the courts of the Ferdinands and the Philips. There was no Aztec strain in the purer than royal veins of the Senorita Felicia, for her grandsires had been upright among an iniquitous nobility, her grandmothers virtuous in an immoral court. Not social contact but ancestry had panoplied this exotic. And instinctively Hemperton recognized the flower of a superior lineage in the luculent and courageous eye, the lift of the exquisite face, the contour of the ripe and sensitive mouth. As he had unstudiedly observed her that afternoon she had seemed to him only little more than an ordinarily pretty girl, with fine eyes and unaffected manner; but the adolescent beauty and regnant poise that became now so captivating had then wholly escaped him.

The don did most of the talking. He interested Hemperton with incidents of the fine hunting to be

had in the mountains but a few miles eastward, the abundant deer and antelope and quail, and sometimes bear, and not infrequently a mountain lion.

"Mr. Hemperton, we shall expect you to honor us with a longer visit at your earliest convenience. I promise you some rare sport."

Mr. Hemperton would be delighted. The don said he would give his guest a letter that would acquaint him with Senor Ramon Modeno, son of a valued and hospitable family, whom Mr. Hemperton would find an agreeable companion for a mountain outing. The American was gratified by the senor's consideration. He thought of a company duty that would call him some miles east from the town in a few days, but he glanced again at the Senorita Sagasto and resolved to return for that hunt, duty or no duty. As to the Senor Modeno, he would of course take pleasure, he said, in presenting a letter; but he did not undertake to define to himself why he was sensible of a reluctance to propose to the Senor Modeno to return with him for the hunt.

After the meal they sat on the veranda, the host rolling and smoking his little brown cigarettes, Hemperton with a pipe. The senorita sang, not for them, but rather in an undertone, to herself, apparently. A piano! In this remote place, thought Hemperton. He would have expected a guitar. And such a voice! Why was this unfolding blossom of a woman thus isolated—expatriated, as it were—on this secluded estate? Why did not her father at least maintain a dwelling in the town? He must be at heart a selfish kind of a parent to deny to such a daughter the pleasures and advantages, such as they were, of the pueblo. Or why did not the senor

reside in San Francisco? The Pueblo de Los Angeles itself was even then a town of perhaps half a score thousand people, with churches and schools and ambitions and not a little social pretension and advantage. Why did the don confine his daughter to the solitude of the hacienda?

Now if he, Hemperton,—but he, Hemperton, had his way to make in this new country.

Then the senorita came to bid good night to her father and her father's guest. The senor arose and kissed her with marked and reverent tenderness, and said "Good-night, princess," with what seemed to Hemperton to be almost a little bit of a sob.

They smoked and chatted awhile longer. Then the don said: "I think I will go to the pueblo in a few days, Mr. Hemperton, and if you like I will make an appointment to meet you there and close this right-of-way matter."

Hemperton was disappointed. He wanted to get through with the business. "Would you much prefer that to closing it here, in the morning?"

The senor said abruptly, "Yes! Now if you are disposed to retire, do so at your pleasure. We seek repose early, but if you prefer to continue smoking I will remain with you."

"Thank you, senor, but I will retire, I believe." So they said good-night. Hemperton went to sleep still wondering at the senorita's contentedness in her isolated home.

He was up as the sun peeped rosily over the craggy Sierra Madres. He tiptoed across the veranda that he might disturb no slumbers, and sought the rosarie, where to his gratification he found the senorita. He thought she betrayed a trace of

annoyance, or, was it surprise, at his early rising.

"Did you not rest well, Mr. Hemperton?"

"Indeed, I did, *senorita*, but this is my usual hour. It is the most delightful time of day, in California, I have discovered. And you, do you always come so early?"

"Yes, as a rule I do. Sometimes my friends from the *pueblo* spend a night with us. They think it is quite extraordinary that I enjoy the sunrise. But I would not forego this delicious air and that glorious mountain coloring unless I were ill, which is rare indeed."

"Do you not become very lonesome on this quiet *hacienda*?"

"Lonesome? No, indeed! That is what my friends are forever asking. Why should I? Is it not lovely here? Then I am occupied most of the time. No, I do not think you could call it lonesomeness. I think no one who appreciates so much beauty as all this"—sweeping her hand to include the great valley and the hills—"could be lonesome."

Hemperton was not given to gallantries with women, but the Castilian was a type altogether new to him. She was not the sighing, coquettish *senorita* that he would have been prepared to find in such an establishment. Being neither timorous nor forward, but only wholesomely natural and unaffected, neither simperingly sentimental nor unmaidenly unsentimental, but fresh and buoyant and deliciously feminine and unmistakably beautiful, the American's interest was at once engaged.

"*Senorita*, may I crave the privilege of a rose of your plucking?"

She flashed the swift shadow of a smile. "I will

select one which you may accept as a badge of membership in my little Society of Sun-ups, if you desire." She separated a choice blossom from the cluster she had gathered for the breakfast table.

"You must remember, however, that you will forfeit your membership if you should ever appear upon the veranda five minutes after sunrise?" she continued, as she proffered it.

"Senorita, I am indeed honored." He removed his hat and bowed, accepting. "I shall be a most observant and faithful member, I assure you. May I hope to enjoy the honor of receiving other degrees in the society, at the hands of its high priestess?"

The speech pleased her.

"Novitiates would better not expect over-many confidences, I fancy."

Then with her handful of roses she moved toward the house. Hemperton would have engaged her in further conversation, but he forebore, seeing her desire to go.

At breakfast Senor Sagasto said he would agree to Mr. Hemperton's right-of-way proposition, and would sign the papers when he should next go to the pueblo. Would not Mr. Hemperton remain through the day? Hemperton glanced at the senorita and declared that nothing would more delight him, but he would be obliged to decline because of important company matters. Would the senor kindly have his horse ordered by 8:30 o'clock?

While still at breakfast, the don was informed by Tizza that Juan Orquez, injured by the tunnel blast, had expired during the night; and it had been requested at the Orquez house that the senorita come before noon, if convenient.

As Hemperton was preparing to depart Father Leon, curate of the San Fernando mission chapel, reined up on his way to the Orquez place. Would the senorita do him the honor to ride there with him? Yes, the senorita would go at once, and her bay was ordered.

The priest and Hemperton were introduced. Presently the senorita's horse was brought, then Father Leon expressed the hope of seeing Mr. Hemperton with them again, and Hemperton watched the priest and the Senorita Felicia ride away together as they had many times before and would again, on an errand of mercy.

A splendid looking man, thought Hemperton, to be wasting his best years ministering to the spiritual poverty of a parcel of stupid Indians, and indolent ill-smelling Mexicans.

He bade Don Sagasto good morning and cantered down the pepper "alameda." And before he turned the obscuring shoulder of the hill he stopped and looked back for a moment upon the figures of the handsome priest and the fair daughter of Sagasto riding, side by side, up the sunny slope to the Orquez ranch.

CHAPTER II

Felicia

COLONEL Denby Weatherford thoughtfully scratched his chin. Colonel Denby Weatherford, of Weatherford and Weatherford, was just a little more than a trifle perplexed. He wanted a certain piece of important information, and he was trying to figure out to himself how he might go about getting it. When Colonel Denby Weatherford was perplexed he manifested the condition of his mind in a peculiar way that afforded no end of amusement to his numerous if not always admiring acquaintances. If he chanced to be sitting near a table when in a doubtful mood, the colonel would rest his elbow upon it, with his hand straight up, and hammer the table with that elbow, sometimes slowly and gently, sometimes with the rapidity and force of a small trip-hammer, according to the degree of intensity or the doubtfulness or the mystification or the inconclusiveness of his mind. They used to say of Colonel Denby Weatherford that no one who had any business dealings with him could ever be quite sure of receiving a positive answer, either favorable or otherwise, until after the colonel's elbow had hammered all the kinks and misunderstandings quite out of the colonel's reflective and somewhat

over-deliberate mentality. When you put a business proposition to the colonel you could be fairly certain of having to wait a wee bit of a time, if the proposition were of a nature that admitted of any hesitancy or consideration whatever, until the colonel not only had time enough to revolve and re-revolve it in that expansive and comprehending brain, but you must be patient, also, until that trip-hammering elbow had hammered out a conclusion of some kind or another which the colonel would thereupon make known.

The colonel was somewhat bulbous as to his general physical architecture, except for the extraordinary attenuation of his legs. The bulbousness of his person, the inadequateness of his extremities and the rather too full-blownness of his manner and general ensemble as he stalked and strutted up and down the thoroughfares, were his most striking characteristics, saving and excepting of course the hammeryness of the colonel's elbow. But with all his bulbousness and strut and un-Yankee-like circumlocution the colonel was by no means an unimportant or uninteresting member of the business community. His fortunes had rather sagged and his misfortunes vexatiously multiplied since he had abandoned wool-brokerage for mining ventures and real estate speculation, believing, as he somewhat grandly put it, that "an era of phenomenal development was about to be inaugurated by the philanthropic sagacity of the constructors of the railroad." The colonel was ahead of the times, not so very many years, but just enough to get his limited resources so snugly planted away in one or two premature projects that his perplexities found relief

chiefly in an almost incessant trip-hammering of his over-worked elbow.

When the colonel happened not to be seated near a table, or in a chair with an arm conveniently placed for his nervous battery, he often scratched his beardless chin, a trick of no particular peculiarity. The colonel had understood that the right-of-way would lie in one direction, whereupon he had gathered in all he could of certain parcels of land for a town-to-be; but afterward the information had been given that quite a different route had been or very likely would be built upon, and the colonel's elbow straight-way hammered his armchair till his coat-sleeve showed a worn and shiny spot and the armchair protestingly squeaked.

So Colonel Weatherford scratched his chin, which promptly stimulated his understanding and accelerated his cerebration, and bethought he then of the very man to tell him the thing he so much wanted to know. That fellow Hemperton, the right-of-way man! He didn't know that fellow Hemperton, but he would proceed to know him, and do it that very day. Then Colonel Weatherford, of Weatherford and Weatherford, put on his white and somewhat dusty hat, and made inquiry at the company office as to the whereabouts of that fellow Hemperton. Not that afternoon, but late in the evening, when Hemperton had returned from a hard and hurried ride into the country east, the bulbous colonel was told by the hotel clerk that that fellow Hemperton would be down directly.

Now the firm of Weatherford and Weatherford consisted not at all of a series of Weatherfords, as you might suppose from the high-soundingness of

the names; but its sole firmship was lodged within the single bulbous personality of Colonel Denby Weatherford himself. There had, as a matter of fact, been another Weatherford for a brief and nebulous time, included somewhere within the over full-blownness of Colonel Weatherford, *the* Colonel Denby Weatherford, head and front and back and sides and top and bottom and general allness of the firm—a sort of mild, inchoate after-type of the head, a cousin whose mildness and inchoateness were so misplaced beside the colonel's pervasiveness that the junior had somehow or other melted out of the firm without anybody in particular knowing that he had ever been in or that he had gone out. But the colonel had maintained the double name, because of its high-soundingness—only he did not say it was for that reason.

Would Mr. Hemperton mind letting Colonel Weatherford know which of the two proposed routes would be built upon? He would be quite willing to pay for the information, if Mr. Hemperton felt at liberty to impart it. He would let Mr. Hemperton in for a reasonable interest in some of his land schemes if Mr. Hemperton could see his way to exchange valuable inside knowledge for real estate. Then the colonel had an inspiration—why might not they, that fellow Hemperton and the colonel, form a sort of partnership? With Mr. Hemperton's information as to company projects, and his, the colonel's, acquaintance and if he might be permitted to say so himself his ability and standing, they should make a clever business point or two, as things were going.

That fellow Hemperton looked the colonel's

bulbousness pretty well over, thinking how fitly the proposition comported with the man. Nevertheless Hemperton felt that, new-comer as he was with his way to make, it were just as well not to be too particular; at least it was not necessary to appear so, just then. So, without telling the colonel what he came to learn, but ascertaining where the colonel's land was located, and suggesting that in a few days he might be able to give some useful information, and he would think it over, Hemperton excused himself and went to bed. The proposition, he reflected, while not quite ethically bomb-proof, so to speak, was nevertheless not to be disregarded—if one meant to get on. It was business. He intended, moreover, to leave the company's employ as soon as practicable, and this might afford a fair opportunity. At least it was worth considering. The bulbous person was not altogether prepossessing but he had the land; that was the main thing.

A few days afterward as Hemperton entered the dining room of his hotel, at noon, there were the Senor and Senorita Sagasto seated near a window. The senor at once saw and beckoned him to a chair facing Felicia. The senor shook hands cordially and reminded him of their hunting engagement. "Can you not come out next week, Mr. Hemperton? Have you met Senor Modeno?"

Hemperton had not. He had been too much occupied. Scarcely could he have analyzed even for himself his real reasons for not having presented the senor's letter of introduction. He knew that young Modeno's family was of the senor's group, and that for him, a struggling ambitious young man with his way to make, to know the Senor Modeno

through the courtesy of the don would be a distinct and valuable acquisition. He had not attempted to argue himself out of a disinclination to present the letter, and the letter had remained in his pocket.

"Well, I will go with you, this afternoon, if convenient for you," observed the senor, and Hemperton promptly replied that he would be pleased.

After dinner, while the senorita was shopping, Don Sagasto and Hemperton called at the company's office to complete the right-of-way business, but the official whom it was desired to see had left town for a few days.

"Very well, very well, there is much time, Mr. Hemperton," said the don, good-naturedly. "I will come again, sir. Have no fear; you have my word."

As they left the building they met the senorita and, at the instance of the senor, they together proceeded to the office of Modeno.

Don Sagasto's great good nature was forever bubbling over, and his courtliness finding expression in a multitude of ways; and Hemperton observed that the don and his daughter attracted much attention, the don for his great frame, his broad, fine shoulders, his bearing of consequence and command, his countenance, distinguished and benign, his broad peaked hat carelessly tilted, his sonorous voice full of authority yet modulated by his unvarying considerateness. He would have appeared the superior man he was among men anywhere, but there on the streets of the not over-bustling town he was a very cavalier without the gay habiliments and the sword of the day of gay apparel and stately manners.

There were bows and courtesies and how-dy-dos and hand-shakes and hat-liftings and glad-to-see-yous all along the street, for the don's lordly figure had been familiar and his character esteemed through many sunny years. It was really quite extraordinary, Hemperton thought, what numbers of people greeted this notable master of many acres, and it was a thing to be remembered to see with what a courtier's manner he lifted his hat and swept a bow to a pretty girl who chirped with delight to find Felicia, to see him lift his head like one of his high-bred hounds and utter his resonant "ha! ha! ha!" when a jocosity touched his humor.

They made a grandee's progress through the street, the towering don and the fair young senorita. Hemperton had never been quite so near to the center of attention so marked, and he was too ambitious to be indifferent to the consequence of the association of his inconsequential self with such a pair as this.

At the introduction of Senor Modeno, Hemperton was sensible of a distinct impression of dislike, though Modeno was entirely courteous and of pleasing appearance. The young Castilian addressed the senorita with almost extravagant ceremony. He placed a chair for her with effusive demonstration, at least so Hemperton thought; but whether it were all designed for this particular senorita, or whether any other pretty face would have brought it forth, the American could only conjecture. But this much was sure—Senor Modeno had altogether overdone the thing, and Hemperton was not in a way to pine for intimate acquaintance with this aristocratic Spaniard with the crafty smile.

The time spent in Modeno's office was brief, as the don and his daughter had elsewhere to go, and the conversation rather limped with all save Sagasto, who was as everywhere and always hearty and full of cheer and wholesome spirits.

Would Senor Modeno come with Mr. Hemperton next week for a hunt in the mountains? Senor Modeno would indeed be delighted, any day that would be convenient for Mr. Hemperton, he said. Modeno, rather a haughty and exclusive scion of a house that had once governed this New Spain long before the American conquest, would have disdained a humble right-of-way agent as companion for a hunt, had not Sagasto, first blood of them all, stamped Hemperton with the passport of his approval. As it was, Modeno thawed enough to observe to the American that he supposed the railroad would soon be completed to the pueblo. The dons and their families invariably spoke of the place thus—"El Pueblo." Mr. Hemperton thought so. He was astonished, he said, that the Spaniards so generally seemed to regard the railway as an intruder, neither needed nor welcome. Modeno declared the country were better without it. It was a region for stock and for grain—these southern valleys were better undisturbed by the so-called American enterprise. Hemperton was too polite to express the contempt he felt for so unimaginative, so uncomprehending, a mind. Even Hemperton himself did not foresee the noble capital of the nobler region that was to be, but his vision was vastly broader than that of these self-centered and undiscerning Spaniards. Hemperton had come to this far-off land for a double purpose—one, to get on. He proposed to do so, regardless.

If these haughty and impracticable dreamers of dreams chose to stand on the bluffs of their prejudices and racial antagonisms and watch the swift current of events go sweeping by, then so much the worse for them. Hemperton was conscious that Modeno was regarding him with furtive but keenest watchfulness. He was entirely sensible of the fact that beneath the young senor's suave and deferential manner there was accumulating a dislike of him, the American, and on the whole the sure perception of it rather pleased him. But his desire to see and to learn of people and things prompted him to master his distaste of the Spaniard enough to accept an invitation to himself, the Senor and Senorita Sagasto to sup at the Modeno home that evening. The Modeno carriage would convey them. The residence of these old friends of the Sagastos, the American found, was very similar to the great adobe at San Fernando, except not nearly so large, the one-storied, white plastered inside and out, thick-walled habitation which in more or less pretentious form constituted the general style of dwelling among the Spanish and Mexican people. Only a few of these plain, strong, cool structures remain in Southern California, passing memorials of a passing race, infrequent, where once they were universal homes, a type reincarnated and embellished out of semblance to the squat, unornate but substantial original in a costly tiled and stuccoed mission renaissance.

The Modenos dwelt among the orange groves of the Vernon, the garden then of the pueblo, a flat, subriguous fertile strip on the west bank of the river four or five miles below the spot where Governor de

Neve's peons built the first dwellings in the Pueblo de Los Angeles, in 1781.

The Senor and Senora Modeno, parents of the young Spaniard, were well on in years, much older than the Senor Sagasto, with less of the markings of the aristocrat than the don, but still Castilians of degree, and possessing much of the distinction and courtliness of manner that so well became the don himself.

Ramon Modeno, the son, quite monopolized the Senorita Sagasto; and Hemperton addressed himself to the two daughters of the house, both of striking and gracious presence, but neither the peer of Felicia. Young Modeno clung to his fair guest, and Hemperton began to infer that the Spaniard was an ardent suitor for the senorita's hand, but he was by no means clear from her manner that Modeno was, up to the present at least, accepted. The senorita received his attentions and his pretty speeches with manifest pleasure; but what maiden would not, Hemperton reflected, for Modeno was quite capable of making himself agreeable and gallant. Felicia laughed and chatted, and coquetted sadly, too, it must be confessed, in the joyous unrestraint of a wholesome, natural, happy girlhood. Her black and dancing eyes played fresh and sorry and merciless havoc with Modeno, but Hemperton was quite positive that running through it all was not the undertone of tenderness of a woman in love, but only the frolicking of a buoyant girl with all a Spanish maiden's love of love and homage and coquetry. Still, what more natural than that Modeno should woo and win this daughter of his race, this handsome son of her father's old friend

and companion. Only, he thought, it would be a pity indeed that so superb a woman should wed a man of probably limited, if not obscure, career; well-born but incapable, no doubt, of ever attuning himself to the new order of things soon to be.

After return to the hotel, and when the senor and his daughter had retired, Hemperton lit a cigar and sat musing till late, in the air. His uppermost thought was how might he best get on and prosper; prosper not in a meager salaried way, but how might he most surely find the trail that would lead to the peaks of success. He was just beginning his thirties. He had been educated for civil engineering, and back in southern New York there seemed to lay fair prospects before him when—well, that which happened were better not dwelt upon. Once it might have been retrieved, but not after these many years. The object now was to get abreast of opportunities in this newest west, here where everything ought to be possible to a man of resolution.

Without having yet reached the point of even coquetting with the thought of a possible alliance with the Sagastos, a step for which his ethical sophistries had not yet begun to prepare him, it was inevitable that he could have come thus within the illusion of her influence without receiving some imprint. It was inevitable that he should think much about her. The senorita was altogether too attractive a personality not to affix something of her individualism even under but passing social contact. Perhaps only natural egotism was parent of the thought that her probable marriage with young Modeno would be, all things considered, deplorable. That was about as far as Hemperton had reached

in his contemplation of this superlative Castilian. The more sensible he became of her superiority the more he wondered at her contentment with her secluded life. She must be a strong and self-resourceful nature to enjoy it, for only the very strong or the very weak may, as a general thing, undergo such an existence without deterioration.

Then, too, what a strange and what a lonely country, this; this oasis wedged between an ocean of desert and a desert ocean. From where he sat he could see the Sierra Madres rising across the road, twenty miles northward, yet seeming to press against the very houses but blocks away, lifting like a mighty wall the purple heights that divide two regions as unlike as the wastes of Gobi and the south of France. What a wondrous, silent land; mysterious, romantic, enchanting! Was its sleep of ages really breaking at last? Would these quiet streets sometime resound with the tramping of feet of a great city and the jargon of a city's noise? Would the ambitions and passions of men work here what they had wrought of splendor and woe, of virtue and vice, of craft and sordidness, of temple and hut, of affluence and squalor, of industrial greatness and intellectual primacy as they had wrought from the wilderness of the other coast?

During the next few days Hemperton was constantly engaged in prosecution of company duties. Early on the morning after the Modeno supper he received a message requiring his presence at the company's office at once. There awaited him an order to proceed some miles east to conclude a right-of-way matter. Most of these rights-of-way had been disposed of before Hemperton engaged

with the company, but there remained a few of particular importance that were turned over to him. Special orders had come from the powers to proceed rapidly. The tunnel was nearly pierced. Track-laying would soon begin. The pueblo and the country had voted a large amount of bonds for so small a population to encourage the company to extend its line to the City of the Angels. Thousands of Chinese who had laid the track down the San Joaquin were to build it through the San Fernando and the San Gabriel and on over San Gorgonio pass. So he rode that day close by the once dominant mission of San Gabriel, and returned at night with the required papers. Thereupon he received special orders from the company attorney, who had unexpectedly arrived, to call again upon Senor Sagasto. Hemperton had been vexed that the Sagasto business had not been closed when the don was in town, but now he welcomed this unexpected opportunity to visit the rancho again. Not yet sensible of tenderness toward the senorita, he was attracted and interested. He would indeed be glad to see her again before young Modeno called there with him, to hunt. He was instructed to go the following day. He put the papers in his pocket and looked at his watch. It was rather too late to undertake the ride that evening. The don would have retired by the hour he could arrive. He intended to start early next morning, but something detained him, and it was well on to three in the afternoon when he reined into the pepper arcade. As he approached the veranda he saw the don, and grouped around him five other men of his race. Sagasto promptly advanced to extend his welcome.

"I am pleased that you have come today, Mr. Hemperton. Some of my good friends are here whom I desire that you may know."

As a peon took his horse Hemperton moved to the veranda and all five dons arose, to whom their host presented the American. One after the other they clasped hands with him in formal and stately fashion, large and solemn-looking men, all some years older than Don Sagasto, but all of the lighter Spanish complexion that identified their superiority over the blended Mexican blood. There was Don Modeno, the elder, whose hospitality Hemperton had already tasted, come from Spain in his early days to estates in Mexico that had been parceled to a grandsire by Cortez himself. There was General Otero, one of Santa Ana's bravest commanders, who had participated in the carnage of the Alamo, and Francisco Gonzales, one time commandante of Vera Cruz; and Don Alvarez; and Don Secundino Castelar, old comrades all, of Don Sagasto, men of force and fire in the earlier days, owners of vast grants from the government of Mexico; men who had resisted the American arms, and who, though long sullen and unreconciled, retired after the conquest to their great pastures and their peaceful homes in the sunny valleys of this southland observing with silent and lofty disdain the slow encroachment of their ancient foe.

They had come, these grim old captains of adventurous and stirring days, to hold a conference and a kind of love-feast of reminiscence with Don Sagasto. There was being planned a festal day among the Americans of the pueblo and the country round about, to celebrate the completion of the railroad,

still many weeks away. They were considering what course to pursue, these chieftains of a conquered race, whether to participate with the American and to assist the Saxon to make merry over the industrial conquest that would but complete the earlier triumph of arms, or to cling to their retirement and sullenly feed their slumbering grudge.

They were a picturesque and striking and pathetic group, the proud but unbusied leaders of a people soon to disappear from the Pacific southwest before the glacial onset of the Saxon and his sons, a people who though almost obliterated from their favored demesne have perpetuated their memory in a musical nomenclature affixed forever upon the map and history of a mighty commonwealth. They typefied at once the racial spirit of opposition to progress, the pride, the glory, the hope, the hopeless protest and the swift decline of Spain's wave of conquest that swept a continent which Spanish kings, sapped by generations of bigotry and corruption, impotently clutched and lost. Hemperton looked into those strong and proud old faces, some of them scarred by battle as well as by years, and felt as if transported for the hour back to a stirring and historic past. These gray and stalwart figures appealed to his imagination as nothing in all his experience had ever appealed. He would have felt utterly misplaced among them, an intruder—unbidden and unwelcome—had not Sagasto promptly interposed the harmony of his own cheery personality. The don bade him be seated. There were wine and glasses on the table, and a great box of tobacco, and heaps of little brown cigarette papers, and a basket of oranges. There could be no taciturnity where the don's

inexhaustible geniality could come into play. The don was not particularly witty, but he was never dull nor morose, and he shone at his very best as a courtly ranchero, master of this great estate, dispenser of an unfettered hospitality.

"Mr. Hemperton, the senors say to me that our people should have nothing to do with the festivities by which you Americans purpose to celebrate the completion of the road. I advise them that they are mistaken. You know, as I have said to you before, that I do not regard with much favor this enterprise, but I am not setting myself against it. I would be pleased if it were not to come, but it is inevitable, and therefore let us not place ourselves in opposition. I have many valued friends among the Americans. I find them honorable and courteous. I would have been pleased, of course, if the Government of Mexico had remained in possession, but we must accept what is, gracefully as we may. Is not that right, Mr. Hemperton?"

"I am glad, senor, that you take so broad and sensible a view. I think the Americans would be much disappointed and surprised as well if you, the leading representatives of the old regime, were to decline to participate. I advise you by all means to enter into the spirit of the new order of things, instead of arraying yourselves against it."

Hemperton was prompted to say more, and say it more forcibly, but he was not only a little in awe of these ancient and dignified personages, but he felt, moreover, that it would be unbecoming in him, a mere youth among them, representative of the force that would inevitably crowd them out, to indulge in biting comment. He was confident that

the senor's influence would determine the course for all. The spectacle of these grizzled old survivors of a passing people met like baffled captains to protest against this last act of a completed invasion, this final proof of conquest, was as pathetic as it was characteristic. It seemed to him incredible that these strong, experienced and sensible men could permit their racial prejudices to force them into an attitude of prideful and impotent opposition. The visiting dons had little to say. The subject had been virtually exhausted, no doubt, before he appeared, and Hemperton perceived that they were silently resentful of this American interloper, and little disposed to admit to their councils his alien and unsympathetic spirit. He was relieved when the don switched to other topics, and still further relieved when after much general chatting and bits of reminiscence and drinking of wine and smoking of cigarettes and comparing of crop notes and stock notes and wine prospects, and numbers of those resounding "ha-ha-has!" from the great chest of Sagasto the five old dons prepared to depart, asking first for the senorita that they might say their courtly "adioses." When Felicia appeared it was fine to see how each of the gray grim bearded and stalwart old dons bowed low over the little brown hand and kissed it with all the ceremony of courtiers in a Ferdinand's palace; and how the senorita regretted they could not remain to the evening meal; how proudly and pleased her father smiled upon her; and how after waving them all back into their chairs again, with a mischievous imperiousness, she pointed a teasing finger at Don Secundino.

"Senor don," said she, "before I may let you and

our friends depart I claim the privilege of hearing the true story of a call recently made upon you by our former neighbor, the eminent Senor Tiburcio Vasquez."

She took a seat beside her father, laid a hand on his knee, and continued with the gravity of a juriconsult:

"Proceed, senor don, we are all attention."

Don Secundino had been shrugging his shoulders, with imploring glances at his companions, each of whom ignored him and assumed a position of interested attention for the expected tale.

Don Secundino arose, saluted host and hostess, bent a look of black disapproval upon his brother dons as he also bowed to them in turn, and said:

"A command from the fair senorita, my comrades, is an honor." At which they arose as one man and bowed low to the radiant girl. She clapped her hands and cried:

"Gracias! gracias! The story!"

Now Don Secundino had been grievously befooled and robbed by the bandit Vasquez, in what proved to be his final raid preceding a long-deserved hanging, and the fellow had been captured—only a few days before this quintuple visit—at a rendezvous near Cahuenga pass, where numerous bullet-holes in an ancient building still standing attest to the arresting posse's accuracy of aim.

"Senorita, my brief entertainment of your illustrious neighbor has cost me \$800 in coin, sundry flesh-welts from ropes that bound me to my own oak tree awaiting my ramson-bringing kinsman, and not a little discomfiture of soul to be deemed so easy a victim of this scurvy rascal. Therefore it rejoices

me"—with an annihilating glance at his companions—"to present my defense, senorita!"

"Bueno! Bueno!" in bassoon chorus from the other dons.

"Those bandit visitors, senorita, were disguised as sheep-herders, and took a most ungentlemanly advantage of my unprotected state. And further, I would have you know, senorita, that but yesterday I visited this condemned Vasquez at the pueblo's carcel."

"Oh! Oh!" from the dons, in varying tones of surprise.

"I endeavored to ease his task with St. Peter by the assurance that I cherished no ill-will toward him for my bodily peril and its cost, but that so far as I was concerned he could settle that little account with God Almighty."

Hand applause from the dons, with much jingling of spurs. Unheeding them he proceeded:

"And will you credit it, senorita, the impertinent villain assured me that should he regain his liberty he would repay me in full. And then—it is unbelievable—with his hand on his heart and making a courtly obeisance he exclaimed: 'For I am a cavalier with the heart of a cavalier, senor don!' "

Through the gush of laughter that shook the old dons to their spurs Felicia's voice cut musically:

"You are acquitted, Don Secundino! And I applaud your charity toward such an ingenious Fra Diavolo! Almost I marvel that you did not expend further generosity upon him."

"Si! Si!" from the dons.

"That were unnecessary, senorita. For the sentimental of your sex had made of his cell both a bower

and a pantry, amazing to see. Truly, my brothers, gallantry should be ranked with the beatitudes!" Then at his signal there was an impressive leave-taking all over again, and with much levity for them the haughty dons mounted their horses, and rode away, as dignified and stately as they had ridden in the combats and defeats of their youthful days.

Hemperton explained his errand, and it was quickly concluded and the papers signed. The senor was impatient to have done with business. Better than anything else he enjoyed entertaining, and he simply would not hear to Hemperton departing that night. The visiting dons had spent the previous evening with him, and Sagasto manifestly had had rare pleasure. But would Mr. Hemperton excuse him perhaps half an hour or more; there were some orders to be given to his major domo: and would Mr. Hemperton make himself perfectly at home.

"Felicia, princesa, come and entertain Mr. Hemperton, will you not, until I return?" and Felicia settled herself in her father's chair, when the don had put his arm across her shoulder and touched his lips to her forehead and received a message of fondness from her eyes.

Of course nothing could have delighted the American more than half an hour alone on the veranda with this flower of the San Fernando. He was not sure of his ground with her yet, not having had opportunity to measure her mental stature. She was a type altogether new to him, and a personality most prepossessing and gracious.

"Senorita, you do not share the prejudices of these fine old dons I have just met, do you, against us Americans?"

"No, I do not," replied Felicia. "Neither does my father. Some of our dearest friends are Americans. More of your people than ours come to the rancho to visit and hunt with my father and he takes as much pleasure in entertaining Americans as Spaniards."

"Your father seems to be their leader."

"Yes, it has always been so; at least for as long as I can remember. The senors who were just here are the dearest old men imaginable. Several of them served in campaigns with my grandfather, General Sagasto, and they are much attached to my father. They visit with us quite frequently and though they are older than father still he possesses great influence with them."

Would not the senorita prefer to reside in town? No, she would not. So much of her life had been passed on the rancho that she would not exchange the freedom of its broad acres and the beauty of its surroundings for the limitations of the pueblo. Frequently her father had taken her to San Francisco, she told Hemperton, and she had been educated there, and once they had made a trip to Spain and through Europe and the Atlantic states. She talked easily and with animation, rather more easily, Hemperton thought, than most girls of her age whom he had known. Evidently the senor had opened to her many advantages and opportunities for observation and some culture. Hers was neither a frivolous nor a premature mind. Its superior fiber had been quick to see and to understand. She was thoroughly a woman, a winsome, fascinating girl, but thoroughly wholesome, normal, brimming with the don's good sense, and all-in-all quite remarkable

for force of character and individuality among a race of women famous chiefly for their beauty and their power to love. Had the Senorita Sagasto been reared in Castile or Mexico it is probable that environment would have stripped her of just that subtle air of independence and individuality so unusual in women of her blood. Had she been bred in Spain she would, no doubt, have been that day but a pensive, bewitching and incogitant senorita with all a Spanish maiden's bigotry and seclusiveness and coquetry. But inheriting to a marked degree her father's great personal force and superior mental make-up, the ennobling freedom of this hacienda existence, her travel and observation, her contact with American girls of the pueblo and her acquaintance with such strong characters as Judge Brecknell, her father's lawyer and chief confidant among all Americans of the region, had contributed to produce in the Senorita Sagasto a type as rare as it was exquisite, the beauty and pride and the grace of a pure-blooded Castilian maiden with an endowment of an American girl's piquant spirit and personality. The composite was an extraordinarily fascinating young personage. Daughter of the finest type of the Spaniards who possessed Southern California from the theocratic days of the padres to the American conquest, daughter of the foremost survivor of a moribund regime, she united in her lovely self all that was most adorable and best of her own race with many of the most admirable traits of American daughters, and thus it might well be said that the senorita personified a type of which there were but few exemplars, and of which she was chief, because the conditions which made her type possible were

unusual and already passing; she was almost the last as she was the loveliest product of the old regime—a connecting link across the social chasm between the departing Spaniard and the triumphant American.

This was the first opportunity that Hemperton had enjoyed to converse alone with the senorita. The freedom of her association with her father's guest was an exemplification of the changed conditions of the period, a confession that the barriers of Spanish exclusiveness were breaking before the pressure of American unrestraint. Had this Sagasto domicile been a Mexican home or an establishment in Castile or had Hemperton come to them ten years earlier, this unchaperoned interview would have been a thing unheard of and unpermitted; but it was America, not Castile; it was a daughter of a Spanish don transported to the last half of the nineteenth century in western America, after American customs had begun to affect even the domestic habits of the people of this former dominion of Spain. Hemperton was quickly sensible of an increasing desire to appear well before this rare femininity developing upon an unseeing world. The inhibition of his own circumstance was pressing less restrainingly upon him, and he yielded more and more to the persuasions of the ingrained selfishness of his nature to gain admission to this new and winsome friendship.

Something less than an hour passed all too quickly. The senor returned, Felicia excused herself, and Hemperton and the don beguiled the few remaining hours in pleasant interchange.

Early the following morning Hemperton rode

back to the pueblo, called upon Modeno with whom he agreed that a week hence should be the date for the hunting trip with Sagasto, and during the intervening time he was constantly employed in the San Gabriel valley and beyond in attending to company affairs.

CHAPTER III

Mountain Heights and Human Depths

HEMPERTON decided that he would enter into business relations with Colonel Denby Weatherford, and told him so. He did not at all like the colonel's style, but the arrangement would provide him with something of a foothold to do business on his own responsibility, and open the way for him to leave his merely salaried position. On one condition, he informed the suave and swelling colonel, would he enter into association with him, a silent partnership only, for the present. If Weatherford would deed to him a certain portion of his holdings he, Hemperton, would give him information that would be valuable to both. The colonel could proceed so far as the public was concerned as if he alone were the firm, but their understanding should be mutual though secret. He would advise with Weatherford, and their interests would be common and really close, but for the time being he desired to have the partnership a silent one only. It was so agreed. The colonel's general bulbous condition became more bulbous than ever as his prospects improved, and his hammering elbow noticeably decreased its nervous pounding. Hemperton's purpose in the secret arrangement was characteristically selfish and

shrewd. He believed the colonel would be a reasonably successful promotor, but Hemperton, being exceedingly ambitious and somewhat foresighted, anticipated that the time would come, and reasonably soon, when it would be rather disadvantageous to be known as a business associate of this over-much full-blown man. He desired all the benefit of a business arrangement that would give to him a parcel of land, with as few as possible of the drawbacks of affiliation with so peculiar and to him so disagreeable a character. The colonel was entirely satisfied. For his own part he wanted the benefit of Hemperton's information and activity while still enjoying the undivided prestige, so far as the public knew, of whatever success might result.

On the day agreed upon with Senor Modeno the men set out for the Sagasto rancho going this time via Cahuenga. All the hills declining gently westward from the little city were then wheat or barley fields or pastures for great flocks of sheep. Nowhere had Hemperton seen a more magnificent sweep of country than that which spread westward to the ocean as he and Modeno cantered over the slopes and descended into the picturesque Cahuenga Valley. Abundant rains vested the lower hills and the valley in vivid velvety green of thick and fast maturing grain. Yellow blossoms of wild mustard were higher than a horseman's saddle and filled the May air with a honey-sweet fragrance. Hemperton was more practical than poetic by temperament, but the surpassing beauty of the tranquil valley reached to his very depths and appealed to all his sense of the impressive and beautiful in mountain uplift and the far off opalescence of the ocean.

Hemperton had desired to know more concerning the history of the interesting Sagastos, and particularly as to the membership of the don's household. Not a word had yet been dropped by the don or by his daughter relative to wife and mother, or to any brother or sister. Hemperton felt there must be some tender spots in the family history, and had discreetly foreborne to interrogate. But he could ask Modeno.

"The Sagastos," said Modeno, "are the proudest and the oldest of the Spanish families of this region. The don is a stately and honorable man, and very much beloved, but he is not a prudent man of business and he has lost a considerable portion of his once vast estate. He had a terrible experience some years ago, in southern Arizona, while making a journey from Mexico. His party was attacked by Apaches and the dona and one of his sons were killed, together with several servants. The don had a desperate encounter and almost lost his daughter, the senorita now at the rancho. Don Sagasto rarely speaks of the fearful day and still more rarely mentions his wife, a most beautiful woman, whose massacre nearly killed the don. He escaped from the Apache knives only by the strange intervention of Tizza, a servant, who—when the slaughter of them all seemed to be imminent—ran to the Apache chief and made a mysterious signal, understood apparently by the chief but by no one else, and said something to him in a language she had never used before her master, and the chief instantly stopped the assault and permitted the survivors to proceed. Tizza would never explain what she had said nor why she was able to influence the chief, but she

saved the don. Sagasto's father, the general, had found Tizza when she was a child, during a campaign in the extreme south of Mexico. She belonged to a strange tribe that claimed to have dwelt for many hundreds of years in a secluded valley among the mountains in lower Mexico. She says her people, more than a thousand years ago, had a great city in what is now Yucatan, and that it was destroyed by another mighty tribe and her people all killed, except a few who escaped and made their homes in the valley near where General Sagasto found her. He saved her from assault by one of his own soldiers, and she attached herself to the general and has been in the family ever since. She claims to possess occult power and to be able to foresee what is going to take place. She is a kind of a, what your people call 'witch,' a reader of the future. The senor and his daughter think everything of her. I think she would burn at the stake for him."

"Where is the other son?" asked Hemperton.

"He is in San Francisco, or roaming elsewhere much of the time. He is a wild fellow, and gives the don great anxiety. Sagasto is the last of his line, and he is very ambitious for his son Ruiz, but the young senor—well, I am afraid." And Modeno shrugged significantly.

"There are no more of the Sagastos," he continued, "except a child, a daughter of a brother of the don. Her father was killed in a battle in Mexico, and her mother died soon after from a broken heart, it is said. The child, Constancia, is at present with a close friend of her father."

Don Sagasto greeted his guests with demonstrative cordiality, and his sonorous voice rang out rapid orders to his peons to care for the horses.

The afternoon was spent in preparations for the hunt which was to take place the following day. They were to start at sunrise, ride some miles southeasterly into a high valley back of the Tejunga mountains. They would then ascend to the pine country of the Sierra Madres, for bear. Guns were brought out and rubbed and polished, and the hounds straightway knew there was business ahead for them. Hemperton undertook to be familiar with them but they were not responsive. They fairly overwhelmed the don. When they became too boisterous he would throw up his head, raise a forefinger and declare that he was astonished at such manners. The finger and a swift, straight look from the master's commanding eye were enough. The don never beat them.

The cleaning of guns and the getting together of hunting paraphernalia took place on the east veranda, to which opened a large room set apart for such appurtenances. Here the don often assembled guests to smoke and take wine or chocolate, and eat his oranges, when the air was too cool for comfort outside, or when the rains came. Hemperton went around to the north side of the adobe to help himself at the spring. He found Tizza there. He was not a considerate man with servants. He had never employed any himself, and he bestowed little attention upon the attendants of others. But Modeno's dramatic story of Tizza had interested him and he offered her an orange which he had plucked shortly before in the orchard. Tizza's gleaming, beady little eyes looked piercingly into his a few seconds, then she took half a step toward him, still looking. She moved away, the glittering eyes not yet turned.

"No," she said abruptly, "I do not want it. Not from you."

"Well! The devil you don't, you cat! What's the matter with you?"

Tizza went away, not replying.

The hunters were up and off early the following day. They rode swiftly to the east side of the valley across the wild-oat hills, ascending rapidly as they approached the base of the mountains. Where the view was finest the don called a halt that his friends might see the rancho and the valley in the morning lights and colors. They were still in the shadow of the mountains, but the San Fernando was bathed in the early sun, its full length and breadth spread like an irradiated map. Far to the south and west stretched the don's fields of wheat, north and west as they looked the red tiles and white walls of the quadrangle and the dark rich green of the orange grove, the yellow-brown mission with its long arched corridor on the sunny side. The glory of a Southern California morning was upon them and around them, filling the sky and flooding the land, and moved by its appeal they sat with uncovered heads enthralled before this miracle of nature. Presently they turned a flange of the mountain that shut the valley from sight, and bore across to the higher mountains beyond. They reached the pines by seven o'clock and chose a place for camp. Before noon Hemperton and the don had each a bear, but Modeno had seen no game. They met at camp after twelve; and, lunch disposed of, smoked and chatted half an hour. The day was warm and the sun and the tramping had made the don drowsy. He said he would indulge in his usual

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siesta if Hemperton would pardon an ancestral habit. Modeno rather wanted a brief rest himself. Hemperton said very well; he preferred to stroll about under the pines; really he cared more for the mountain air than for the hunt. He would take the dogs and return in half an hour.

So the don and Modeno stretched on the piney carpet, and Hemperton calling the pack moved toward a higher point where he thought he might obtain a view of the valley and the ocean far beyond. He had been walking perhaps twenty minutes when he heard the pack yelping, but somehow he had no inclination to follow. It was pleasanter to go on slowly and drink the balsam of the pines and catch those glimpses of the shining sea between the great trees. He was really relieved to escape from Modeno, because he had to admit to himself a strong unreasoning dislike of the young Spaniard. Modeno had paid more attention to the senorita than to preparation for the hunt, during the previous afternoon, and after the evening meal they had sung together while Hemperton and the don smoked and talked on the veranda. Clearly young Modeno was a suitor for the senorita's hand. Well suppose he was? What could it concern him, Hemperton? Under the circumstances he should not feel the slightest interest, yet he was permitting himself to think about it altogether too much. Then he wondered if the yelping of the dogs had aroused Modeno, and he wondered why any thought of Modeno should occur to him at all in that connection. He had been absent from camp, how long? He looked at his watch—about twenty-five minutes. There was no need to hurry back. The don would preer

to sleep awhile under the sheltering pines. The hounds were sounding again, not so plainly. He might as well go on in their direction; but, for a reason that he could not explain to himself and really much to his own surprise, he presently became conscious that without in the least intending to do so he was circling back in the direction of the camp. He had set out intending to go to that high viewpoint up there, but instead he was involuntarily returning to his companions, and the impulse to go directly had now become unaccountably strong. As a matter of fact there was no occasion for him to hurry, he knew perfectly well, yet he was actually increasing his pace. Then he fell to wondering what excuse he could devise for an early visit to the rancho again. He would immensely like to stay there for a week and come on a hunting trip alone with the don. Well, here he was almost at the camp again. How unreasoningly absurd! He would turn off to the right and go after the dogs. But he did not. He kept straight on to the camp. He was so near to it now that he would see if the don was awake and ready to hunt again. There, he could see Sagasto now, apparently still asleep. Where was Modeno? Oh, there behind that pine, sleeping too, no doubt. Modeno wasn't a bad sort of a fellow, but why did he dislike the Spaniard so decidedly?

What was it—that blackish thing there so close to Senor Modeno's face. He did not remember having seen it when Modeno laid down. His hat? No, Modeno's hat was white and was visible on the other side. Not a cone, was it?—no, not the size nor the shape. Why, the blackish thing moved! A snake? What—why, could it be possible? Good

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God! a rattler, coiled, facing the sleeping young senor and not a foot away?

If he ran toward it would it not surely strike? If Modeno stirred, strike it certainly would, strike him full in the face! and Modeno was just as like to move the next instant as not. God help him if he did!

Well, and if the thing did strike?

He, Hemperton, was much too far away to prevent, and if he called to the Spaniard to beware, the sleeper would surely stir and the slightest movement would invite that swift and deadly fang! What could he, Hemperton, do, and why should he, Hemperton, care? He did not like the man, anyway. He was then and there, during the horrible eternity of that single instant, profoundly aware that he most thoroughly disliked Modeno, even more than he had realized. He did not dislike him merely because he felt fairly certain that Modeno would marry Felicia, but he disliked him for no other reason than that he positively did not like him, an instinctive antipathy, unreasoning, unprovoked, illogical, but still fixed and strong. It was no concern whatever of his if Modeno should marry Felicia. But unless that coiled and flexuous thing uncoiled and crawled away, or unless some miraculous protection interposed, young Senor Modeno—scion of a foremost Spanish family and heir to many fertile and sunny acres—would never wed the Senorita Sagasto. Hemperton comprehended then in that age of an instant that he wanted to marry the Senorita Felicia himself. There were reasons, or there had been, why it were perhaps better that he should not—but with his eyes fixed upon that waiting and fati-

ferous visitant at the very face of the Spaniard who probably was expecting to marry Felicia, most likely, if the spiraled venom did not strike, and with death thus writhing around the very head of the man whose marriage with the senorita would be the most natural thing in the world, Hemperton comprehended that regardless of all barriers and circumstances, regardless of all Modenos and all other possible rivals and obstacles, he wanted—more than he ever wanted anything in all his ingrained selfish life—to marry the Senorita Sagasto himself. Modeno was of her own race and station, rich, or in a way to be, and already well in her favor, while he, Hemperton, was a stranger, of alien blood, landless and unknown. Naturally, of course, naturally, it would be the Spaniard—unless!

God in heaven, what an “unless” for a man to contemplate! God in heaven, what an alternative and a temptation to put before a hating, passionate man! Why was such an alternative, such a temptation, paraded before him? Why did he even think about it? He seemed to have been standing there for hours upon hours, and his limbs were stiff and his hands were cold, yet the time had been but seconds. Time is long to a soul in agony, and Hemperton’s temptation was as black as his hates and prejudices and his passions were strong. He had only to remain passive till the sleeper moved. And if he shot was he not as likely to hit the sleeper as the black coiled snake, and then be totally misunderstood and perhaps charged with murder? God in heaven, what horrible temptations afflict the human mind, he almost groaned! Then he put his hand to his face, not meaning to do so, and felt the

place where the beard was thin. He was not in any sense a skilled or expert marksman. He had handled the rifle but infrequently. If he shot at the snake the chances were about even that he would miss it anyway, even if he did not hit Modeno. But to shoot was at least the only thing to do. He raised his rifle and fired. Everything turned black around him, but that aspish and sibilant thing by the Spaniard's face seemed a bright and shining mark. The horses started and the sleepers awakened, astonished by a report so loud and so near. Senor Modeno got one swift glance at the wriggling, rubbery, horrid menace—went bloodless to the lips, rolled away, then stood straight up.

Hemperton had not taken his eyes from the reptile, but sweat was streaming down his face though his flesh felt cold, and for an instant he seemed to be old and very weary.

Modeno walked straight to Hemperton and put out his hand. "Senor Hemperton—you have saved my life."

For a little Hemperton did not reply. "Well," he said, very slowly, with something of a drawl, still looking at the snake, then changing his gaze to the man, "I believe I did, Senor Modeno." After another pause; "and perhaps, senor, I saved something else." His eyes went back to the snake. Modeno was asking with look more than with speech what it was he had saved besides.

"Why, senor," with a drawling tone and disguising smile, "saved some one else the trouble of killing a damned rattlesnake!"

That ended the hunt. The incident had spoiled the rest of the day. The bears were fastened across

the backs of the horses, the hounds were called, and the huntsmen started slowly homeward.

"A remarkable and splendid act, sir, splendid," declared Senor Sagasto many times, praising Hemperton's nerve, decision and aim.

"I beg of you don't mention it, senor." If the don knew, he thought, what temptations had assailed him and tortured his tottering soul before that shot was fired, perhaps the don might be more sparing of his praise! Hemperton hated Modeno more than ever, now that he had saved his life; hated him for having been the cause of those horrifying soul-searing alternatives, those dark and murderous thoughts.

At the rancho Senor Sagasto related the incident to Felicia. She closed her eyes, at the last, as if to exclude the hideous vision. She was silent. Then she moved to Hemperton and put out her hand. "It was very fine, senor." Was she thanking him for saving Modeno to her? In any event he wanted no thanks, above all none from her, and in that instant of her undesired commendation he was conscious of regretting that he had yielded to that unaccountable impulse to return to camp.

The next morning Hemperton and Modeno set out for town. They rode side by side till they reached the mission church, where the turn to the right led to the Cahuenga, to the left to the old Fernando stage road down the valley.

There Hemperton drew rein. "Senor Modeno," he said, in a dry, acrid voice, "you and I cannot be entirely comfortable, at present, in each other's company."

Modeno would have protested, not a little amazed,

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but Hemperton went on: "You know it as well as I. It were as well not to disguise the fact. I saved your life, but damn you! I'm sorry I did it! Choose your road to town, and let us ride separately."

"Senor Hemperton, this is exceedingly strange. I do not know why you dislike me. But for that matter I do not care. I have not sought your friendship. I wish you a very good morning." With more real dignity than Hemperton had hitherto seen in him, Senor Modeno inclined his head, lifted his hat and abruptly turned his horse down the Cahuenga road.

CHAPTER IV

Father Leon

DURING the following few months Hemperton moved rapidly in dispatch of the company business, continually extending his acquaintance and discovering fresh opportunities that he turned to the benefit of the firm of Weatherford and Weatherford, of which he was still an unknown but in reality an active partner. The great tunnel was completed and daily communication was established between the south and the north. The public festivities which had been proposed for the purpose of celebrating an event of undivided importance to the state were soon to take place. Ceremonies and speech-making during the afternoon were to conclude at night with a banquet and more felicitations preceding a ball. Under the advice of Don Sagasto the leading Spanish and Mexican land owners had decided to take part in the celebration. Sagasto himself had been chosen to represent that people, and he had consented to make a brief address in Spanish for the particular benefit of the still considerable Spanish-speaking population. The event was properly regarded as the most epochal since the American conquest. There was sure to be a great concourse of people from the country round

about, and Hemperton was extremely gratified and flattered by an invitation to make some remarks at the banquet, where many of the most prominent men of California would be gathered. He had been promoted to the general land-agency for the company in that district; his forcefulness, ability and capacity for making friends had brought him into no inconsiderable prominence, and altogether he was looked upon as a coming man of affairs. His faith in the development of his adopted land was unbounded, and he felt that his chances for accumulating at least a comfortable fortune were excellent. He was intending to resign from his employment later, but meantime he was turning his opportunities to the best possible account.

And during this period he had made frequent visits to the Sagasto rancho. He and the don had become companionable friends, and more than once the American had managed to spend a day with the don on the hunting trips which Sagasto so keenly enjoyed. Notwithstanding Senor Modeno was vigorously pressing his attentions, Hemperton, however much he had been restrained by circumstances of his situation, had already flung himself boldly into rivalry, and sought the presence of the senorita at every befitting opportunity. Sometimes he met her in the pueblo; sometimes at the hotel; not infrequently at the homes of her friends when she came to spend occasional days, and at gatherings to which his own agreeable social qualities and extending acquaintance brought him multiplying invitations. But he delighted above everything else to pass an evening with the senorita on that reposeful veranda,

or to gallop along beside her over the viewful slopes of San Fernando, skirting the wheat fields and the vineyards, and across the upper pasturage where grazed the senor's sheep. The senorita was a fearless horsewoman and the poise of her body and her high coloring as she went galloping along mile after mile were a pictureful and fascinating example that few indeed of her young women friends from town even dared to imitate and fewer still could rival. She reigned over the rancho and over all the San Fernando region with the manner and the authority of a princess indeed, high-spirited, audacious, imperious, but gracious and considerate, scattering the largesses of her ministrations upon the sick and the dependent, thoughtful for everything and everybody, and by every living creature, animal and human, fervently adored. Never an ailing child among the diminishing Indians and the more numerous Mexicans that in the main comprised the charge of Father Leon but the Senorita Sagasto was swift with a dish of selected food or a medicine or a trinket to entertain; never a baby born but a bauble or a garment from her prompt generosity evoked a "benediction" from the parents; never a confirmation at the mission chapel but she contributed at least a veil for every girl or a gift equally appropriate for every boy. With the priest she was co-adviser and almost co-confessor for quite all his parishioners; and as for Father Leon himself, she was at once his unattainable delight and the cause of his soul-testing despair. She distributed her benefaction with unwearying watchfulness, but she had a thorny word of reproof ever ready for the indolent or the misdemeaning,

and the senorita's displeasure was a flagellation and a disgrace more dreaded among her father's dependents and through all the little parish than the censure of Sagasto himself or even a chastisement by the indulgent priest. She did not hesitate to ride through a February storm of wind and rain to the bedside of the sick or the dying, nor did she spare her scorn for a parent's neglect of duty.

"You are not half severe enough," she said to Father Leon when there came to her knowledge of a parish girl's over-trustfulness in a faithless and evasive lover. "Your authority over these children is absolute, father. Compel him to do that which a man should."

The priest had not told her, but she knew, as she knew all that transpired within that willing little sovereignty of hers, and she promptly went to Father Leon to ascertain what he proposed to do.

"I have spoken with him, senorita, but it is more for the civic authorities than for the attention of the church."

"Little do they care and less will they do, these American officers, in such a case," she answered, almost angry with the priest. "I will make Alfredo do his man's part by her myself."

And make him do his man's part she did! Not scorning the mother-to-be, her persuasion, command and sympathy drew the full story; whereupon she bade Alfredo come to her; and Alfredo meekly came, and promised and performed, under the lash and the appeal of this chatelaine who would not be denied.

"I wish our Spanish men would show more of the spirit of you Americans," she declared to Hemperton,

during one of their rides. "I am not so foolish nor so impious as to regret that I am a woman, but if I were a man and still a Spaniard I would have tried to do before what you Americans are doing now. Our men need not have waited for yours to make this country great. They should have done it themselves. The padres began the evolution, but something more than a spiritual development has been needed. Your people will accomplish it, but ours should have begun it." The spirit of her was superb. It shone in her eyes, and gently dilated the fine and delicate nostril.

"That is not altogether encouraging for the young Senor Modeno," thought Hemperton, triumphant. He said:

"Indeed, senorita, they might have done so, but they never will now, I think."

"No, they never can," a little bitterly, regretfully. "You Americans will take all. Some of the senoritas in the pueblo say to me that I am becoming too much like your American girls. Do you think that is true?"

"You could not become more admirable than you are, senorita, no matter how American you might be, nor how innately Spanish you might remain."

"That is a very pretty and a very adroit speech, Mr. Hemperton, yet it does not answer the question; but you need not give another answer. If you were to tell me that I am becoming American I might not be pleased—I am sure I would not be pleased; and if you were to say that I am like the others, then—I should be still less pleased."

She turned upon him an expression so composite

of gentle mischief, coquetry and high spirit that the American was moved to the very precipice of a declaration. But he would be satisfied for the day with the indirect thrust she had given young Modeno. Hemperton thought that both she and the senor had seemed to like him from the first. His welcome at the rancho was ever without restraint. Both manifestly admired his forcefulness and his ambitious energy. On the occasion of more than one visit at the Sagasto home he had found Modeno already there, or the young Spaniard came before Hemperton's time for leaving. Of course the American had dissembled his dislike for Modeno, and both had necessarily maintained a pretense of courtesy. Hemperton had been unable to detect any preference for the Spaniard on the part of Senor Sagasto, and Felicia's manner was equally indiscriminating; though what might have transpired between them when Felicia and Modeno sang ballads, as they sometimes did at the piano or with guitar accompaniment while Hemperton and the don conversed and smoked on the veranda, or what tender interchange might sometimes be taking place in their occasional confidences in the Spanish tongue, Hemperton could not know. But the Spaniard did not, on the whole, seem to be getting much the better of him.

The ceremonies by day and the banquet by night were memorable. The governor was present, and the outpouring of people astonishing for so sparsely habited a country. Hemperton was fourth on the list of speakers. He had roughly prepared what he most desired to say, but being full of his theme he trusted to the occasion and to the stimula-

tion of wine to make expression fairly easy. As he arose he saw the eyes of the senorita, placed more toward the end of the table, fixed upon him, and to her and for her chiefly he spoke. He observed Modeno nearly opposite his own chair, regarding him sharply, with something like a snarl on his rather fine mouth, a calculating and somewhat envious smile. It was Hemperton's first speech, and he wondered at himself, at his self-possession, and at the ease with which he was able to express his thoughts. As he proceeded he saw Felicia's eyes sparkle and her color rise. She was visibly pleased, and if she were then he was indifferent to the others. No not wholly, either. He desired to make an enduring impression. He proposed to get on in this town, and he felt that he was at last really doing so. No one had been or was afterward more heartily applauded. His speech was apposite and well said, and he knew it. He had succeeded. He could see that there was not a little surprise that his comparatively unknown self had been able to acquit himself so eloquently.

Afterward he elbowed his way through the throng, receiving many congratulations, to the senorita and her father, to say good-night.

"Mr. Hemperton, we had no idea that you were such an orator," she said.

"If I did well, senorita, it must have been because you inspired me. No man could look upon such an auditor and not be eloquent to a degree; not even a man as dull as I."

The senorita's color deepened just enough to be perceptible.

"If I am becoming like your American girls I can say now, sir, that you are acquiring some Castilian ways, for you can make as gallant speeches to women as our Spanish gentlemen, Mr. Hemperton."

Hemperton bowed, very low for him. "Senorita, it is not gallantry alone. I assure you. I am speaking from my heart."

It was the boldest love speech he had ever made to her, and he thought she seemed not displeased.

The Senor Modeno had heard that last remark, approaching just then. He icily bowed.

Some days afterward Hemperton was starting for a ride eastward from the city when he met Modeno, also horseback. They saluted stiffly. "Where are you going?" asked Modeno. The tone and the manner were not pleasing to Hemperton, whose objective point was on the mission highway. But he answered:

"Your question, Senor Modeno, is somewhat impertinent, under the circumstances; but perhaps I shall not mind informing you. I am going to Don Sagasto's hacienda."

Senor Modeno's red lips tightened. "Mr. Hemperton might do well to visit Don Sagasto's rancho not so frequently."

"The devil you say."

"The devil I say—well I have said!"

"Well, and if—Senor Modeno?"

"We Spaniards have a way, Mr. Hemperton!"

"So I have heard, Senor Modeno, so I have heard! It may or it may not have come within the scope of your understanding, Senor Modeno, that we Americans also have a way—a way, senor,

of not caring a continental for what you are pleased to call your Spanish 'way.' Humph! Senor Modeno, I regret to observe that you can be as fatiguing as you are impertinent. I have the honor to wish you a very—bad afternoon!" And with sardonic ceremony Hemperton raised his hat, bowed, and rode away—toward the San Fernando road. But business required him elsewhere, and when he had traveled far enough to fully convey to Modeno—should the Spaniard look back—that he had indeed gone to the Sagastos; and when he had got quite out of sight of Modeno, he reined in his intended direction. He chuckled to think how Modeno must be raging and blaspheming the while. His Spanish "way," indeed! Wasn't that characteristic? So, that was the sort, this haughty Senor Modeno! Very well, so be it! All the more he enjoyed the thought of the probable inward raging of the young man, whose handsome face had so nearly been spoiled by that flexuous preying reptile.

"Colonel," said the silent partner one afternoon when he strolled in and found Colonel Denby Weatherford alone, "I wish you wouldn't be so infernally bulbous!"

Now really, the colonel was quite the solemnest man in all those joyous parts. The wit and good nature of the obese had no exemplar in Colonel Denby Weatherford, of Weatherford and Weatherford. You couldn't call him exactly fat, either. It wasn't obeseness, it was bulbousness, a form of general bigness peculiar to Colonel Denby Weatherford alone. His abdomen was ample and even superfluous, but hopelessly unsymmetrical. It was—

n't like other large abdomens, graduated from the throat to the waist. It was all at once, as it were, right at the waist—more like a great misplaced bun than an abdomen.

"Why, my dear sir, my dear Mr. Hemperton," exclaimed the colonel not mildly but very much surprised, "what in thunder do you mean?"

The colonel's imperviousness to humor was to Hemperton humor of the rarest kind. The colonel's solemn visage and huge bun of a waist were unending sources of quiet fun to the silent partner—the bun of a waist and the absurd turkey-legs.

"I dislike, Mr. Hemperton, I really dislike exceedingly to have my personal appearance commented on unfavorably!"

"I wasn't referring so much to the considerableness of your anatomy, as to the general overdoneness of your manner." He had fully made up his mind that he would not be an avowed business associate of the colonel; neither was he ready, and might not be for a long time, to sever the connection, but he did relish worrying the colonel. It was not exactly the way to treat a senior partner, but the colonel was more dependent upon him than he upon the colonel.

"I really believe you could get married, colonel, if you would pare down your overdoneness a little." He knew the colonel believed himself to be impressive with womenkind, and that he particularly prided himself upon his unctuous demeanor and that fetching way of putting his hand upon his heart when he scraped and bowed to any female person.

Clearly, thought Hemperton, the senior partner's sense of humor is not improving.

"I may tell you, Mr. Hemperton, that I have been thinking, lately, since my business has so greatly improved, that perhaps I may marry—one of these days. Now only this afternoon I was standing in the door there when a most bewitching young woman, I am sure she was a senorita, passed with a large, fine-looking man whom I took to be her father. It occurred to me, would it not be a clever thing if I were to marry a Spanish girl—a daughter of one of the old-timers for instance, heir to one of the big ranchos? I shall think about it, I certainly shall."

"The ass!" mused Hemperton. He had humor enough for one day, at the colonel's expense. He had intended to discuss a matter of business, but now he only chatted a little and then departed. The colonel's denseness was rather too much for him, this time.

He went to the rancho a day or two afterward. The colonel couldn't have seen Felicia and her father, as he thought might have been the case. They had not been in town that day. Besides, Weatherford certainly knew them, or at least the senor.

Hemperton's status in the town was perceptibly improved since that banquet speech, and even Felicia and the don were a shade more cordial, if anything. The senorita did not disguise her admiration for his big broad-shouldered compelling way of doing things. Moreover, she observed that he could talk fluently and more easily than any of the young Spaniards whom she knew, and his manners were certainly quite as engaging.

In the course of his visits to the Sagasto rancho Hemperton had come into frequent relation with Father Leon, and between the priest and the American a considerable friendship and mutual liking sprang up. Father Leon was a type with whom Hemperton readily felt at ease. The American was not a religionist, and he wondered that this vigorous, fine-brained, resourceful man could reconcile himself to the incredible immolation of a life devoted to what Hemperton considered to be a mean and unappreciative field. Father Leon was a most winning personality, and a frequent and ever-welcome guest at the Sagasto home. He was a full-blooded Spaniard, a native of Toledo. He had been educated in Spain, in Rome and at great Catholic universities. His traveling had covered Europe and the larger part of the United States accessible by rail. His frame was large and very powerful, his face benign, noble, and intellectual, his age something less than Hemperton's. Certainly, thought Hemperton, he had all the appearance of the superior ecclesiastic that he was, a cultured and able man, well-born and bred, and how such a man could deliberately expatriate himself into this impoverished inconsequential parish composed chiefly of the Mexican dependents of Don Sagasto, and descendants of the mission's Indian neophytes—with perhaps half a dozen assorted Americans—was a marvel indeed to Hemperton. Why, there, the American said to himself, there was a master and a leader of men, those hands were the hands of achievement, that mouth and that nose were the nose and the mouth of a statesman or a financier. Yet he had

elected to come among these humble, mindless people; he, arseneled as he was with unusual power, to minister to those stolid folk of childish mental stature. What a sinful misdirection, the American thought, what almost criminal misappropriation of force! The priest knew the ways of the busy world beyond the mountains; he had seen the wonders wrought of Saxon brain and Saxon vigor, and he quite comprehended the hopefulness of Hemperton, quite understood the transformation possible in this rediscovered occident. The priest's was a far more penetrating and imaginative mind than that of Sagasto himself or of any other man of Latin blood within that sea-girt and mountain-guarded region, and Hemperton wished that he might shake that sacrificial resolve and turn Father Leon from his unresponsive field to one more befitting his constructive powers. Hemperton hinted as much one day after their acquaintance had become sufficiently intimate to preclude a suggestion of impertinence, but the priest's mouth hardened and he raised his hand to stop the tentative appeal.

"No, my friend, I must not hear, and you must not speak. It cannot be, not now! Rome has assigned me. Rome accepted a spiritual parentage. Rome educated me! Rome inspired me! And the church's claim upon me is imprescriptive. Rome has my oath and the church my heart and soul. I am a soldier of the cross, my friend! I am as ambitious as yourself, but for a far different end. I believe with you that your Americans will make a splendid and a populous country of this old New Spain, and it is my dream that here—

where my intrepid predecessors planted the cross a hundred years ago—the faith of Saint Peter shall fructify as nowhere else in your protecting America. I am Spanish born, but I am American in thought and feeling, now; and I hope to see, somewhere in these sunny valleys, probably in the City of the Angels itself, the most majestic monument of the Catholic faith that has yet been erected between the oceans, and a mighty population affectionately loyal, in spiritual matters only, to the Holy Father! And, please God, my friend, I shall do all in my humble power to bring it to pass!”

The priest’s pulsating earnestness and his broad nature interested Hemperton profoundly, though the American gave little thought to questions spiritual.

“That is all very well, Father Leon, but you must confess that you have rather unpromising material here to begin upon a project so ambitious. These parishioners of yours do not comprehend what religion means, much less could they appreciate such a splendid hope as you entertain.”

“That is not for me to say, my friend! The church of Rome is for such as these no less than for the influential and the more intelligent. The humblest Indian of them all, Mr. Hemperton, is as dear to the church as a grandee of Spain or the president of this republic. The arm of our Holy Father reaches out to embrace all mankind. A vicar of Rome thinks not of himself. He presumes not to choose his field. He goes unquestioningly where the church assigns him. He lives for others, and I am contented that His Holiness deems me worthy to be an instrument in his sacred purposes.”

Thereafter Hemperton said no more for a long time. He respected the priest's idealisms, but deplored his sacrificial unworldliness. He derived great pleasure from the association, and told Father Leon to command him for whatever he might need. The relationship between Father Leon and the Senorita Sagasto and her father was extremely close and congenial, and quite approached that of a member of the family. The Sagasto doors were ever open to him. When the don had perceived the uncommon intelligence and gentle breeding of the young priest he had invited Father Leon to make the rancho residence his permanent home, and to consider that all of the privileges of kinship were his. But the priest had abnegated the luxury which ancestral habits would have prompted him to enjoy and had stoically habited a scantily-furnished apartment in the corridored mission monastery which had survived the gnaw of time and the despoilment of a ribald soldiery quartered in the historic buildings after the secularization. He was made to understand, however, that he might come and go at will, and he had accepted the Sagasto companionship and hospitality unpresumptingly. He esteemed the don, and many grateful hours he spent on the inviting veranda in converse with Sagasto or in happy meditation, and many indeed were the rides that he and the senorita enjoyed across the poppyed Fernando slopes and around the senor's empire of wheat. The priest's well-stored mind had been one of the chief formative influences that fruited in the senorita's quick intelligence. He attempted with this fair parishioner and companion little of the direction and authority that ecclesiastics

usually assume over the ordinary members of the faith. He gloried in her independence and strength of character, encouraged the outreach of her virile mind, and silently worshiped her very shadow as it came and went!

Love her! God help him, how could a man so normal, so capable of appreciating such perfection of a woman, help loving, down to the very foundations of his steady soul, in every vibrant chord and fiber of his being this superlative, imperious, fascinating daughter of a nobleman of Spain. Love her! Ah! pity, pity, pity for this human struggling tortured ambitious sacrificing and ever-adoring priest! Young, magnificently manful, pulsating with the humanness of life! A vicar of Rome, a soldier of the cross, a sworn crusader of the faith; but still, God help him! still a man from crown to toe! Tell her he loved her? Never! There is where the manliness of the priest stepped in! Tell her? Never! But the torture of the man-priest in him, the protracted luctation between the self-dedicated instrument of God and the humanness of the full-statured, full-panoplied man would have rent the soul of a less masterful man-priest than his to mere tatters of priestliness and flung a lacerated wreckage of celibate vows upon a scorning world!

No one had ever suspected the agony behind that strong and almost ascetic countenance. No one had ever heard him pace contendingly to and fro in the self-encagement of his locked and darkened sacristy or the aisle of the mission chapel when all the unsuspecting parish was aslumber! No one had ever known that many a night by moon, by spectral starlight, or when clouds made the valley a pit of

catacombed darkness this soul-stormed man strode like one fleeing from a thing to be forgot along those silent highways and byways that intersected the senor's leagues of wheat, strode and supplicated the God of his fathers, in the very anguish of his soul, to give to him, servant of God, priest of Rome, soldier of St. Peter, fortitude to go his sworn and chosen way, strength to abide by his vicarship, strength to look but priestfully upon this captivating daughter of his race, this exquisite personification of womanhood who could not—God be patient and fortifying—could not be for him, this tantalizing beauty, this maiden so appealing to a full-natured man in all that a strong masculinity would most adore in womankind! No one had ever penetrated into the innermost sanctuary of his guardedness to see him throw up his arms in impetratory anguish and invoke the indulgence of the Most High to deliver him from the devastating tempest within, either by investing him with enduring steadfastness or by removing him from the presence of this almost unbearable temptation! No one ever suspected, nor ever would suspect, how narrow had sometimes been the margin of his strength; how, many a time the man had so nearly vanquished the priest, and how he had—lacerated by temptations beside which the temptations of Saint Anthony were inconsiderable—by sheer compulsion of indomitable will and by saving invocation of his priestly oath, averted a resolution to foreswear his priesthood, pour out the plentitude of his adoration for Felicia, rip away the restrictions of his somber frock and join the world of living men again! No one ever suspected, nor ever would, yet all this the priest had undergone,

and more, and still the fires of his love burned fiercely on, and still the life struggle between the vows of the priest and the heart and soul and human nature of the hungry complete man went on and on. Never did the Senorita Felicia know, nor even remotely suspect, so undisturbable was the priest's command of his features and his intonation, so dictatorially was he master of himself. So she rode and she sang and she strolled and she worshiped, and she ministered to his ailing and his unfortunate and she comforted the miserable; his assistant, his coadjutor, his companion, his delight, his tormentor, his despair—his redemption! And so she rode and sang and talked—and, sometimes, teased and scolded, wringing his great adoring manly heart, yet never once suspecting, or if ever so, concealing. But no, it were a thing impossible. Felicia's was too considerate and too generous a nature to have tortured the priest by coquetry or tantalizing had she ever suspected the conflict distracting his honest heart. He was her priest, her confessor. She would be no Heloise to his Abelard. She had no thought save honest enjoyment in their comradeship; she had no contrition because she had no secret love. He was a man, through and through, with all his surplice and his priestly habiliments and his pectoral gold cross, and she profoundly admired his manliness and his wholesomeness, and her frank companionship and unconditioned trustfulness but wrung his loving heart the more, as she went on queening it over the willing parish and over his adoring self.

And thus it was, when Hemperton was visiting much at the Sagasto establishment, and maturing

his resolution to address the senorita, that the suffering, tortured, brave Father Leon was in the very thickest of those soul-testing combats between the man and the consecrated vicar of Rome.

CHAPTER V

The Heart of a Woman

PERCHED high on the knee of her Uncle Cristobal, the doting Don Sagasto, quaint and elfish Constancia was a new and at once a loved little figure at the tranquil country home. After her father had been killed in troubled Mexico, and the prostrated and broken-hearted mother had mourned herself beyond all cure, this fragile and forsaken casket filled with the precious and noble blood of the diminishing Sagastos had been temporarily adopted by an adventurous and landed friend and comrade of her father. This pro-parent had pledged his knightly word to the mother to protect Constancia as he would his own until he could himself conduct her to her uncle Cristobal in California. Journeying through interior Mexico in the early seventies, and even for many years after, was attended with both danger and discomfort; and some time elapsed before the willing but busy guardian found opportunity to make the then long and wearisome journey to Vera Cruz and thence to Panama on his way to deliver the child to her uncle. Correspondence between the wilds of Mexico and a country so far away as California was then a matter of weeks and even months. Uncle Cristobal had been advised of the

orphanage of his niece, and in his response of thankful appreciation for the voluntary guardianship he said he would go to San Francisco to meet Constancia when apprised of their arrival.

Young Ruiz Sagasto, the don's wayward son, returned with his father after a period of not altogether profitable schooling in the metropolis. At once he became a factor of disquietude and inharmony in the well-ordered household and brought down upon himself the censorious indignation of his sister; but he wheedled the indulgent and doting don as he had done time and time again by promises unfulfilled and by adroit excuses for his graceless ways. Hemperton and the young man got on agreeably enough together at least during the earlier weeks of their acquaintance, and on the occasion of more than one hunting trip Ruiz developed qualities so companionable that Hemperton began to think Modeno had overdrawn the unpromising side of the young man's character, and the American really came to the conclusion that the boy's waywardness would disappear with advancing years and wise counsel. There was a streak of surliness and irresponsibility running through the son's character, however, which cropped out so balefully as to cause misgivings even to the friendly Hemperton. The face of Ruiz was rather good looking but uncandid, and a cruel and sensuous twist to the otherwise characteristic Sagasto mouth suggested an atavism from some collateral stream of ancestral blood quite uncomporting with the benignity and considerateness of the character of his father.

But the elfish niece was the don's instant and never-ending delight. The timorous, interrogating

wonder with which she looked into the dark eyes of the uncle she had been told was awaiting her in distant California, the dark eyes whose tenderness promptly drove away her last lingering doubt as they bespoke the unqualified love of a father come again from that height to which his great arms hoisted her when the guardian who brought her said, "This is Uncle Cristobal," melted before the swift joy of this new home and the instant mothering of the loving cousin. And from the secure throne of her fond uncle's knee she speedily divided sovereignty of all Fernando with Felicia. Her scepter the don's walking staff, the prime minister to obediently execute her royal will the subjugated don himself; with quite the mien of a princess real, she accepted as of right and habit the homage of the rancho retainers and the wondering regard of the simple folk of the vicinage among whom she made many a princess' progress cushioned on the saddle front and sheltered by the reliant arm of her faithful minister of state.

Hemperton and genial old Judge Brecknell, bluff and hearty, and as rosy as a ripening pomegranate, came as great barons might from far off provinces and swore prompt allegiance, and straightway became, the judge for all the rest of his honest and sunny life, the staunch and firm supporters of her reign. Nor was Father Leon remiss; this imposing, handsome man who always wore the black clothes, and whose voice was so deep and vibrant and mellow and whose smile was so kind when he said the name "Constancia," and who took her by the hand and led her through the brownish and rather gloomy mission building that reminded her of one she

vaguely remembered in the wild country so far, oh! so very far away. All of them called him "Father" Leon, her Uncle Tobal and the others, though she did not quite understand, and Cousin Felicia told her to call him Father Leon; and Father Leon kissed her on the forehead, and took her upon his lap. She did not like people to kiss her and take her upon their laps; but she was glad that Father Leon had kissed her, even if only on the forehead, though she would have been willing to be kissed by him as her Uncle Tobal did, and he cuddled her, to her nestling delight, because "really and truly" she loved Father Leon very much; and she promptly told him so.

"Only you may kiss me," she said, while he was leading her by the hand one balmy afternoon down the umbrated pepper arcade, "only you and Cousin Felicia, and Uncle Tobal, and Cousin Ruiz, and, and—well—that's all, I think!" Very proud and flattered was the good priest, he said, to be thus included in the little company of court favorites of this dainty sprite of a princess. Many wonderful rambles had they, elfin and priest, through the pillared cloister of the mission, and many a raid they made into the poppy-fields where those golden bubbles of imprisoned sunshine embrangled her scampering feet. Her prattle and her odd and oldish comment delighted the gentle priest and eased for the hour the laceration and the aching of his heart. He plucked fruit at her bidding, and hoisted her to his shoulder when her quaint and fragile majesty weary grew with her excursions into the orchards and the berry patches and the embrasures of the hills flower-tufted by January rains and gray and elephantine in the summer. If her uncle was

premier the priest was lord cardinal, and she loved and ruled both, loving and loyal subjects who fetched and carried, who braided coronets of golden poppies and wild hyacinth and buttercups and mariposa lilies for her graceful head, who nestled her midget majesty to sleep on their big protecting chests on sultry afternoons. A privileged character, she peeked and pryed at her own unopposed will into the nooks and corners of the priest's simple quarters where others had not fared, or perched contentedly beside him whole minutes together at his study table while he spread before her occasional illustrated books and precious vestments and altar-ornaments preserved from the despoiled Franciscan treasures of Father Lasuen and Father Blas, or cradled her restlessness to rapt and exclamatory delight with tales weaved from his own imaginative brain.

"Haven't you got a little girl?" she asked the priest.

"No, my child; no little girl."

"Not any little girl at all," she insisted, not one, not even a littler one than she?

The good priest, irradiated with almost boyish glee before simplicity so sweet, seriously and solemnly shook his head and said, no, not even a littler one than she, apologetically, for such short-coming.

Her dark and shining eyes looked intently into his a space then: "Well I think you ought to get a little girl, 'cause I would like to have one here when I come to see you. If you get a little girl will you please call her Marta, because Marta was a little girl where I was when the dear good other papa brought me to Uncle Tobal, and I loved her, oh so very much! Will you get a little girl for me?"

"My child, I fear no little girl would come to live with me. I think any little girl would surely be very lonesome here in this gloomy old mission ruin."

"Oh! no, she would not. I would tell her how good you are to little girls, and what nice stories you can tell. Would you tell stories to her?"

"Yes, Constancia, if I had a little girl I would indeed."

"Would you tell her the same stories you told me?"

"Perhaps, my child."

"And would you tell her some other ones too?"

"Perhaps."

"Some better ones?"

"Maybe."

"But you mustn't tell her better ones than you tell to me."

"Very well, then, no better than I tell to you."

"Well." A little silence while she climbed into his lap and toyed with the gold cross. Then looking at the cross intently: "Don't you think you would like to have a little girl?"

"Not while I can have you, Constancia."

"But I am here only sometimes. I mean would you like to have a little girl here *all* the time?"

"Bless your heart," he exclaimed, gathering her close in his arms and pressing her head all fluffy and hidden in a mass of thick, black, soft hair, to his breast, "bless your heart, I want no other little girl at all, so long as you will come to see me, cherub!"

Then she curled like a kitten and lay very still a long time, for her, while Father Leon read a book and occasionally stroked the nestling head, till Felicia came to take her home.

Her quick Sagasto mind responded with swift

comprehension and the fire of the Sagasto spirit kindled under the affectionate and intelligent tutelage of Felicia. Felicia taught her to make sweeping courtesies, and one day as Father Leon approached the veranda she threw him into a perfect transport of delight by daintily lifting her wee skirt and courtesying so low and so gracefully that no trained court damsel in a king's palace could have done it more bewitchingly. The priest responded with a bow very low and with ceremony extreme and courtly, and the elfin's keen mind caught the full humor and charm of it, and she twittered with glee as he tossed her away to the ceiling and crushed her close to him while her arms went clingingly around his neck.

The don went about from morning till night in almost unbroken transport of amusement over her pranks and prattle, enraptured over her instant acceptation of their devotion and her sweetness and her oldish stately airs and ways; and the towering uncle and the chirping, satisfied child became almost inseparable companions from the very day he gathered her small orphaned self into his eager arms from her good guardian's care.

It was now something more than a year since Hemperton had ridden up the pepper arcade and received the senor's cordial welcome that May afternoon. He had come through that perennially green and noble avenue many a time since, and ever enjoyed a greeting no less hearty and no less sincere. He and the don had ridden and hunted themselves into companionable understanding, and between Felicia and himself sprang up a relationship that had begun in the frank camaraderie of normal and healthy

minds, but had matured into as ardent a love on his part as a man of his nature could experience, a state of mind and heart that he had half way resolved he would deny himself. Propinquity, association with this girl of much more than ordinary beauty and finer poise of mind than he had ever observed in womankind, together with his own selfishness, had been stronger than his resolution, and he was face to face with the undeniable fact that whatever considerations may once have influenced him had been swept away and left him as thoroughly in love with the Senorita Sagasto as a man of his ungenerous and calculating nature could be. The time was approaching when he would certainly ask the don's permission to pay his addresses to the senorita. He had come to feel reasonably confident that she was at least not totally indifferent to him, and not infrequently he flattered himself that her liking for him was really more than friendly and passive. Among the young men of his own as well as of her race who buzzed about within her particular orbit during her by no means frequent appearance in social circles of the City of the Angels, and among the several who might fairly be said to be familiar figures among the ever-welcomed stream of guests at the Sagasto establishment, Hemperton believed himself to be as much in favor as any, with the possible exception of Senor Modeno. He felt quite sure that the Spaniard was his only serious rival, and he had to confess to himself that it would be entirely natural if this young and good-looking scion of a family of aristocratic blood, with sure inheritance of a large estate, should capture this jewel of the Sagastos. He really feared that the senor's

preference would be strongly, too, for a family alliance with Castilian blood; and, as Felicia's regard for her father was peculiarly devoted and profound, it would be altogether too much to expect that she would treat with indifference any desire that the don might express that she favor Modeno if alternative should come that she must choose between them. Modeno rode well, which Hemperton also did, sang well, which Hemperton did not, was altogether agreeable, engaging and manly in his bearing and quite as assiduous in the paying of his addresses to the senorita as the American himself. And Hemperton, selfish and self-centered as he was, never deceived himself as to the formidable nature of Modeno as a competitor in this bout of love. More than once the rivals met at the rancho, or coming or going. Modeno glowered like a savage and snarled like a panther, stung to resentment more and more by the cool and contemptuous indifference and unfailing civility and good humor of Hemperton whenever they encountered upon the premises of the don. The American, with no less capacity for anger, possessed far more self-mastery, and the more the Spaniard exposed his own jealous rage the more he chafed and fretted under Hemperton's complacent and self-contained disregard of Modeno's defiant and menacing underplay, the more deliberately tantalizing Hemperton's simulated good nature and mocking civility and thinly-veiled contempt became. Hemperton studied to exasperate him, and succeeded. Hemperton knew the Spaniard was consuming with fury, but he cared not. Hemperton read in every curl of the crafty but well-made mouth a threat aimed at himself, and in every gleam

of the black and glittering eye implacable and vindictive hatred; yet he flaunted his cool contempt and defiance of Modeno by the most extreme and deferential and smiling courtesy on the rather infrequent occasions of their meeting and he brought all his arts of sardonic placidity of manner and drawling complacency of speech to bear to fan the mounting flame that was gnawing faster and faster into the Castilian's tottering self-control. Never was Hemperton for the briefest interval unaware that Modeno was entirely capable of assault or even assassination. He faced the certainty of a dramatic denouement of some kind to this prolonged game of hate and love. Physically brave, but morally something of a coward, the zest and the uncertainty of this silent combat exhilarated him like a liqueur. His own placid self-control gave him immeasurable advantage. He hoped to provoke Modeno to a premature and ungentlemanly outburst under circumstances that would discredit him with the Sagastos, but he was guardedly aware that the suppressed fury might as likely as not find an outlet in the form of an unexpected attack upon himself, but still he feared not. He felt as easily superior to the young senor in a fair physical encounter as he was in a measurement of wits and in self-repression, but the chances altogether were that whatever physical encounter to which his goading might provoke his fiery rival would be anything but fair, and that a midnight stiletto or an ambushed bullet would be quite the natural sequence to that curling and tightened lip; and still he cared not, nor for an instant did he forbear.

Once when the four of them—Hemperton,

Felicia, the don and Modeno—were chatting on the veranda, and a sudden gust of wind made Felicia shiver a little and exclaim that she would better have a wrap that lay upon the table, both sprang to adjust it; but Hemperton, though the more deliberate and the less excited, reached it first and coolly placed it and received the senorita's quiet "thank you." The Spaniard turned to cover his confusion and fury in the making of a cigarette, while he curled his lip and spat like a tormented cat, and a cat's green lightning shot from his eyes to smite Hemperton, who from his point of vantage behind the senorita's chair leveled a pair of mocking defiant half-closed eyes, and bowed with an almost imperceptible inclination of complacent self-content and triumph at the writhing Spaniard. It may have been a dangerous but certainly it was an exciting contest, and every phase and turn of it thrilled the American with real and vindictive joy and troubled him not at all. He fell to speculating when and where and how the accumulating passion would explode, and he wondered if the intensity of their silent interchange of challenge were not communicating to these unobserving observers, the senor and Felicia. Indeed both did see, but faintly, the discord under-playing between these equally welcome guests. Both father and daughter were far too perceptive not to penetrate through those urbane but steely exteriors and discern a drift of temperamental antagonism, but neither probed the venom of the one nor the instinctive cynical lofty detestation of the other.

"You and the Senor Modeno are not entirely cordial, are you?" asked the don.

"The Senor Modeno does me the honor to dislike

me, I have a fancy," Hemperton easily replied, "still I find him both entertaining and courteous, and no doubt we shall continue to get on quite amicably."

"He is a good fellow, Mr. Hemperton."

"No doubt of it, senor, no doubt of it!" replied Hemperton; but no more was said.

The senorita, more astute and penetrating in such matters, perhaps because it was around her that this combat of wits and deadly hatred was raging, but still as utterly undreaming of its intensity as she would have been utterly unprepared for and incensed by any outward manifestation, was sensible of cross-currents of feeling playing upon and involving and surrounding her. Just as no woman can be oblivious or insensible to a really moving passion, be it ever so cleverly disguised, so the senorita's perceptions were altogether too finely attuned not to vibrate under the powerful emotions of these intensely earnest, passionate and adoring men. Modeno had been bolder of speech, and while he had not in so many words avowed himself, she was aware that he loved her and she expected that he would soon declare. She was equally positive that the American was wooing in his calmer but no less determined way, and she would have been little of a Castilian and less a woman indeed had she not thoroughly enjoyed their admiration, accepted the adoration of both, coquetted distractingly with one and then with the other, lifted them to the sublimity of a strong lover's hope, and tranquilly dropped both to the abyss of a strong lover's hopelessness, and all without in the least meaning to do anything of the kind. There were others, as she well knew, who more or less distantly paid respectful tribute to her

fascination, some who had even dared to approach; but these were the chief and preferred adorers of them all, the most ardent, the most forceful, the most appealing and interesting in their manfulness and their courage, and she queened it and coquetted it and demured it and womaned it over Hemperton and Modeno with all the queenliness and coquetry and superb womanliness in her most distracting composition. She knew these strong men were rivals, but bless her, how could she help it; and bless her, for what reason in all the glorious world of indescribable femininity would she have wanted to help it if she could? She was a woman—a young, lovely, adorable, prideful, highly-organized clever woman—and a Castilian, besides, with all the tender, imperious and fascinating attributes, all the perfections and imperfections which that implies, together with a measure of western girlish Americanism with all the unfathomable feminine heart-breaking and heart-ennobling soul-wrecking and soul-uplifting, levitating and delevitating perfections and imperfections which that implies; and just as almost any other clever Castilian girl or clever American girl possessed of adorable and distracting feminine characteristics and mannerisms would have done, she went right on week after week, month after month, accepting the adoring attentions of both, letting both prostrate their very hearts before her, top-loftily pretending to see nothing whatever of it, and during every joyous single minute of it all thoroughly delighting in it, as millions of the dearest girls in this wide old world had done before her time, and as millions more of them will do in the years to come, Heaven bless 'em!

She knew that Hemperton and Modeno were rivals, of course she did, God bless her! and she knew they loved her, and that both would tell her so in good manly fashion, but she did not know they were hating each other in such blasting and blasphemous intensity right there before her very eyes. Not she! She never dreamed of such an improbable thing, and if she had very likely that fiery temper of hers would have done a little exploding itself, and she would have expatriated both of them forthwith from the confines of her little sovereignty where there must ever be nothing but peace and love and beauty and only tranquil comings and goings, God bless her!

She knew that these big strong men were rivals and she understood in a way that their rivalry had engendered some strain of feeling, but never for an instant did the hot and hissing current of their hatreds and jealousies scorch her pure soul or excite her suspicion of its deadly swirl and streaming.

And thus this human drama of human life and human hates and loves and passions went moving along on the sunny slopes of San Fernando, working out the epitasis of its very human way under the lights and shadows, the strength and the weakness, the pride, the hope, the despair, the anger, the depths, the heights of this strangely weak and strangely strong human nature of ours; this drama that had opened so blithely and so sunnily but which was to close so tragically for them all, save one!

And thus the rains of another winter had come and gone, fructifying the earth and reproducing the miracle of reincarnated life that men call spring. And thus another Southern Californian spring had

enameled the lean and tawny hills with shining emerald, and the slopes and valleys with its lush of grain. The senor's fields were fat with the promise of plenty and the senor's herds browsed contentedly under a May-time sun, and the proud old senor himself, lord of this once greatest barony in all the great southwest, complacently banqueted his eyes upon that satisfying prospect, happily dispensing a stately hospitality, happier above everything else in his fatherhood of his imperious but tender Felicia, and actually rollicking in his joyful premiership of that chirruping autocratic elfin of a niece who was ever busily fortifying her sovereignty over all from her high enthronement upon her uncle's ever-ready knee.

And thus in this May-time of sunshine and starlight young Senor Modeno made of it the May-time of his love for the senorita. He would have poured his Castilian eloquence into her ears long before, but secretly he feared the American. Before Hemperton came there was no rival to be considered, at least so he thought, and he did not at first regard the American in that relation. But all at once it burst upon him that this pushing ambitious fellow was dangerously ingratiating himself; and though he could never have admitted it to others, he was both jealous and alarmed because the American was unmistakably a power; with all his handicap of landlessness and unknown lineage he was a growing power.

"Felicia, my adored one," the unhappy Modeno exclaimed one tranquil afternoon, well toward sunset, as they were riding slowly homeward from the western boundaries of the estate, "Felicia, I can restrain it no longer. I must tell you the love

of my heart though I but say to you, adorable senorita, what you have known for years, that I love you; and knowing that I love you, you have, Felicia, permitted me to go on loving you as the years went and as other years came." He had drawn very close to her. She was not looking before her, but with eyes fixed upon the ground, though seeing nothing in particular, waiting and sorry. "Almost from childhood, it seems to me, beauteous Felicia, I have loved you. Then you went away with the noble senor, your father, to the country beyond the sea, and to the convent, and I saw you but infrequently till the nearer years; but I did not forget the beautiful senorita, the princess of the great Fernando, where my father brought me in my boyhood and where I came to you again when you returned from the convent. And we have sung of love together, my adored one, you and I! and I have talked of love, not mine, you thought, sweet angel, but mine indeed, in all that I said and all that I sang. But what was there new to tell you, since you could read it in every adoring glance of my ever-adoring eyes, and hear it in every syllable when I sang the love songs, senorita, and you must have understood it as plainly as if I had said, radiating as my love for you did from the expression of my face when you were near me, when I could look into your eyes, my beloved, and when my very heart stopped pulsating under the infinite melody of your voice!"

He had reached a hand across to hers and held it, not withdrawn, but still the senorita wished that he might not have spoken, though she knew he would.

"Our people, my adored Felicia, my father and yours, have expected, I think, that we should love.

I am sure of it. We are of one race, a race, sweet *senorita*, who love as no other can, and with all the fervor of our blood of Castile I swear that I love you."

It was an unlucky speech, that about their fathers expecting them to love. She knew, at least, her father expected nothing of the kind, or if he had hers was not the heart to follow thus the expectations of any one, father or not.

"Felicia, my adorable Felicia, I have let myself dwell in hope ever more hopeful because your manner to me seemed to tell me that which I knew you understood, you accepted. I have dared, my princess, to believe that you loved me, since you turned not away from the love I have poured out to you in a thousand ways. When a man loves as I have and as I do, Felicia, he need not say the words to make it understood; and you, adorable *senorita*, have known it all and have not turned from it."

Now that the impetuous young Spaniard had at last begun to speak he grew more eager and impatient. He withdrew his hand and would have put it across her waist.

Felicia said: "Please, Ramon, do not," turning to him and smiling faintly and a little sadly. "Ramon, dear old friend, I know, yes I know that you are—fond of me. I am glad that you like me, Ramon, but I am sorry that you care so much as you say. I like you, dear old friend, but not that way. Now that you have spoken, I shall be frank with you. I have seen that you were loving me, but what could I do or say, dear old friend? Do you not see, Ramon?"

The bitter disappointment and chagrin were

pumping the blood from his face and drawing taut the muscles around his mouth.

"I could not help letting it go on. It was necessary for me to wait. Is it not so, Ramon?" She was very gentle, liking him sincerely and exceedingly sorry to hurt him. She put her hand on his arm, but Modeno was looking hard and straight ahead, with a set and bitter and a hating face—not hating her, but the American, hating him with so uncontrolled a fury that he momentarily forgot Felicia and what he had just been saying.

When Felicia saw that vengeful shadow on his face, misthinking it for herself, she shrank from him and flushed and threw her head up, as the don would when angry or commanding.

"You did love me, senorita, before the American came!"

"Senor Modeno, you and I have been good friends too many years for you to be surly with me for that or for any other cause. Not even you, dear friend and comrade as you have been, and as much as I have liked you,—not even you have the right, nor shall you attempt with me, senor, to say why I do or why I do not love you or any other. I am *I*, Senor Modeno, the Senorita Sagasto, of prideful blood, and neither you nor any one may question thus for whom I may or may not care!"

She struck her bay sharply and passed Modeno by some lengths, but he hurried to her. "Senorita Felicia, be not angry, I implore. I beseech you to think again! Shall all the adoring devotion I have put before you count for nothing in this hour of my uttermost hope? Shall the comradeship of years, the affinity of our race, the association of our families,

the kinship of our tastes weigh only as the air in this supreme hour of my long and steadfast love? Can you, senorita, who have let me worship you year after year, divinity of a woman, can you lightly tell me now that a woman may thus accept a love to spurn it as she will? Felicia, you do not mean it! Felicia, it cannot be that you understand the terrible force of it, else you would not have let it go on—only to reject it in the end!

He was pleading now with intense appealing and impassionate voice. She had slowed to a walk and Modeno pressed closely and put his hand over upon hers again. "You know, Felicia, how fiercely a Spaniard loves, and you know what such a love as I bear you means to a man of our blood! It cannot be and I will not believe it, senorita, that you have loved me not at all. You are but waiting—is it not so, Felicia?—to hear the fullness of my heart. Angel of a woman, torture me no more, but tell me it shall be well with us both."

She had never loved him, though there had been a time when she thought she might; and because of that and because she truly grieved to wound him, she let him speak, withal not a little surprised at the intensity of his emotion.

"Dear old friend, I am very sorry, but the heart of a girl is an uncertain thing, I fear. We have been happy together, in our comradeship, and I grieve, Ramon, I do indeed, that I cannot give you the love you ask. Quite understanding that you cared for me, could I tell you that I liked you greatly, but loved you not, dear friend, till you spoke these words to me? But I did not think you cared so much, else you would have told me long ago, and now

indeed I wish you had. What could I say or do? Should I have sent you away, and for what reason? Should I have borne myself coldly or forbidden you to come, when I liked you and valued you and welcomed you?"

Modeno was all of a tremble. In the bitterness of his defeat, in the intensity of his love for Felicia and of his hatred of the American, his self-mastery, never as complete as Hemperton's, was tottering now. The senorita saw that he was powerfully moved.

"Come, dear old friend and comrade, forgive me for the hurt that I would have spared you gladly indeed if I only could! Forgive me, Ramon, for I like you very much, and am indeed deeply sorry."

She had turned to him and put her air-browed hand upon his arm again.

"No, senorita, I will not have it thus. You have no right. It is for me that you should have cared, not for the American. You, a daughter of Castile, should have loved a man of your own race. These Americans do not know what it means to love a woman as I love you. You shall love me yet, Felicia. The American shall not come to the rancho! I will address the Senor Sagasto for my aid."

Swift as the human emotions may ebb and flow, her anger had risen under the unmanliness of that speech.

"Senor Ramon, if you are less the man than I have believed you to be, then I am more disappointed than if I had loved a man who loved me not at all. I will not hear you more. I but repeat, Senor Modeno, that whether he whom you call the Ameri-

can cares for me or not, a daughter of the Senor Sagasto may not be put to testify nor to be questioned as you have dared to do!"

She would have wrenched her hand from the grasp of his, and ridden away, but he held more firmly, utterly forgetting.

"Senor Modeno! Must I command you to ride alone?" The furies of her Latin blood were dancing in the dark eyes grown black in her indignation. She would not struggle to release her hand. She stopped her bay and faced Modeno, leaving her hand utterly limp.

"Senor Ramon Modeno!" she said slowly, icily but very quietly.

Not the word, but the imperious disdainful command of the eyes, and the haughty prideful lift of the head were enough. White and with a drawn and almost distorted face Modeno looked piercingly into hers for a space, yielding then before her masterfulness.

The Sagasto mouth that could be so tender, barely curved its scornful line. "Will you ride first, senor, or shall I?"

Then utterly he broke, and quick forgiveness melted the hardening of her face. "Senorita, Senorita Felicia! Idol of my heart! I beg a thousand pardons! The very bitterness of it poisoned my soul! I have been so sure, Felicia, so very sure, that the disappointment cut away my strength. Be merciful, Felicia! I should have said to you long ago what I have said today, that is all. But, adored one, I was so very sure! Am I pardoned, Felicia?"

Pardoned, aye, indeed, he was! "Now you are

my dear old friend and comrade again, Ramon," all her gentleness and liking for him sweeping back into her face, and all the haughty pride and anger sweeping away as she put her hand across to his in full restoration. "I like you very much, Ramon, and always shall—when you are manful."

Then Modeno lifted the little hand, always bare when she rode, to his lips, and kissed it devouringly three or four times, dropped his head heavily upon his chest with eyes closed for a space, then threw up his face again, moved closer to Felicia and said: "I shall win you yet, my beautiful Felicia!"

"Don't! Ramon! Don't say it, dear friend! Yet you would better say that to me than the other—the thing you have no right to say! Come, Ramon, it is getting late. Let us ride faster."

Faster they rode, and faster, out of the rosy west, away from the setting sun, across those green and tranquil slopes toward the great white house among the pepper and olive trees, through the gathering opalescence suffusing all those southern hills and valleys as the gold and the rose of the iridescent sunset worked their wondrous alchemy.

CHAPTER VI

The Picture on the Mantel

ABOUT this time it was intimated to Father Leon by the bishop of Monterey and Los Angeles, whose diocese embraced all of Southern California, that the young priest might and probably would be transferred to a more important field in El Pueblo de Los Angeles during the approaching fall or early winter. Father Leon's ability, his exalted and masterful character, had long before so impressed and pleased the bishop that he had resolved to enlarge the scope of the priest's influence and to open to him a field more befitting his powers and more congenial to his energizing temperament. Father Leon's intellect and character had already attracted attention in the pueblo. From time to time, having become almost from the day of his induction into the San Fernando mission curacy something of a favorite with the bishop whose see was in the City of the Angels, he had been called to temporary vacancy in that larger field. His winning personality and his great force of mind affinitied to him the attachment and the admiration of men of brains and leadership both in and out of Catholic as well as Protestant congregations. Intellectually Father Leon was considerably superior to the good bishop him-

self, but the bishop instead of being jealous was generously delighted and praiseful, and their co-operation and mutuality of understanding were flawless. The priest's oratorical powers and his tolerant and patriotic views were already known in the small but growing city, and not infrequently he was invited to participate in appropriate public ceremonies. Hard practical worker that he was, doer of good, ardent Romanist and disciplinarian, nevertheless there was inter-threaded in his character and temperament not a little of the mystic and the poet, a supersensitized imagination and a search-light radius of vision, with none of the delimitations of the cantor or the bigot. He believed with Hemper-ton in the early and enduring development of the then narrowly understood Southern California, and instead of pedestalling himself away from secular interests he delighted to discuss with the pushing American and with men of affairs generally the prospects and probabilities and ways and means for the regional advancement. The special object of his unrelaxing ambition was a Catholic people, a growing, pulsating, powerful church gathering into its fold the incoming population, allegiant in faith to Rome, but thoroughly red-blooded American in its fidelity to the Republic. The pictured and ennobling beauty of the region appealed to his imagination; the embrasured and rugged lift of the Sierra Madres that melted into spectral opalescence far away in the east where the desert spread its hot white mystery at their base, the viewful slopes of San Fernando and San Gabriel, the broad and ever-fecund plain that reached from the town to the shimmering and placid sea twenty miles away southwestward; the romantic story of the early

pioneering by the church filled him with undulling delight; the story of how Rome had sent her sagacious and militant messengers to implant the faith a hundred years before among the dusky and nomadic tribes that thinly peopled the lowlands and the rare water-courses from San Diego to "Yerba Buena," erecting missions whose grayish and crumbling walls and unreverberant campaniles still proclaim the pious zeal of those crucigerous and seraphic padres. Had he been consulted, Father Leon would have preferred a metropolitan assignment. His strong nature, his agile mind, his storage-battery of energizing vitality would have reveled in a field where he could have measured his strength with the forces of a vigorous and achieving people. Had he been less a true soldier of the cross he would have fretted under the appalling limitations of his parish where slothful, stolid and moribund fragments of moribund tribes of Indians and some scores of illiterate Mexican peons comprised practically the whole of his little flock. Hemperton was right. In all that coppery dull-witted company that filed into the cool, thick-walled mission chapel—a large room fitted up in the monastery—of a Sunday morning and on the saints' days, few could read and fewer still could write, and few could rise even to the level of the plain and almost childish talk to which the priest graduated his outgivings; among all these stupid, slow-thoughted, uncomprehending natures that confided their inconsequential sins and their neighborhood prattle into the priest's ears there was not one mind attuned to his, not a soul that he could touch with the power of the priest who was over all so very much of a man.

But being a true soldier of the cross he faced this social and intellectual starvation as he would have faced Siberia or the savage men of the Soudan. In the divine scheme of things interpreted by Rome he was but one instrumentality, humble, brave and unquestioning. Should it please Rome to send him to Sahara or to the Arctic or to impenetrable Thibet, he would have been ready and uncomplaining; and to father a parish of his own stature he would go, unrejoicing.

There were the Sagastos to be sure, but he had never included them, as a matter of course, in his catalogue of parochials. They were Catholics, and he was their priest. But they were, in addition, his friends, companions, associates, social equals, sustainers, confidants; without their presence, their kin-like welcome, their unfailing sympathy and comradeship he would indeed have felt himself an expatriate.

Father Leon had been in charge of the historic parish of San Fernando perhaps two years when Hemperton appeared at the Sagastos. During the greater part of the first third of the nineteenth century the mission of San Fernando was nearly the foremost in wealth and importance among the twenty-one missions established up to the date of secularization. The San Fernando, the seventeenth in order of establishment, was founded in 1797 by the very able Franciscan Padre Fermin Francisco Lasuen. Lasuen was a masterful character. He was a native of Victoria, province of Alava, Spain. He proved to be the greatest successor of the altruistic Junipera Serra, who had begun the founding of upper California missions at San Diego in 1769. Padre

Lasuen founded ten missions and confirmed ten thousand, one hundred and thirty-nine persons, mostly Indians. For eighteen years he was the father-president or superior of the missions. He died at Monterey in 1803, where his bones lie with Serra's. Under Lasuen's direction all of the missions thrived in prosperity and influence and multiplied their neophytes.

It was in honor of this very forceful and commanding proselyter—who was in breadth of vision many years in advance of his times—that the navigator Vancouver named the conspicuous headland and landmark known as Point Fermin, which stands out protectingly on the west side of San Pedro harbor. Father Fermin Lasuen had formerly presided at the mission San Gabriel for two years, and he drew upon the abundant resources of cattle and sheep, the grape vines, the figs, the olives and the citron of the already flourishing San Gabriel, and upon two of three other missions as well, to lay the foundation of the new establishment at San Fernando, under orders from the reigning king, Charles IV of Spain. The mission was named in honor of "the holy" Ferdinand III, who united the crowns of Castile and Leon. A carved wooden statue of that canonized sovereign long occupied a conspicuous place in the mission sanctuary, but was subsequently transferred to the frame edifice of catholic worship at Fernando village, where it remained an enshrined object of veneration. Although the site of the proposed San Fernando mission was remote from timber, yet it was chosen because of its attractive prospect, the fertility of the soil and the considerable number of Indians, the Tuleranos, dwelling thereabout. The

program usually observed in the founding of a mission was followed by the zealous Lasuen. A bell to summon Indians was hung on a tree if one were convenient, or fastened in the "enramada" or brush house that answered for a chapel pending the erection of a permanent building; the hymn "Veni Creator" was sung, a cross was erected, the flag of Spain unfurled alongside the banner of the Virgin, then mass and preaching, the "Salve Regina" and the "Tedium" were chanted by the padre and his assistant priests and neophytes, guns were fired to contribute the incense, and the benediction pronounced.

Spain had proposed a policy that might have been beneficent had not Mexico revolted before the mother-country could execute her plan. Under the padres the Indians were to have been christianized and civilized and taught to become independent artisans and husbandmen and villagers. They were instructed in many of the useful arts and industries. They wove cloths and blankets and other fabrics. They made shoes and saddles and furniture. They fashioned the iron grill work that entered into the construction of the monastery, and which remains only as window protectors. Spain had intended that the greater portion of the lands of the San Fernando and all the other missions should be parceled to the neophytes after they were qualified to cultivate and care for them, but never an acre did they receive, with one or two favored exceptions. Mexico cut away from Spanish sovereignty, and in the turmoil and revolutions which prevailed in Mexico for many unsettled years thereafter the preconceived policy was never carried out. Instead,

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the avarice and bigotry and insecurity of succeeding Mexican administrations brought about the complete destruction of the magnificent mission estates.

The Franciscan dream of a spiritual custody of California was ended by the secularization. From 1836 to 1842, under Governor Alvarado, was a period of desecration and plunder. During that reign of brigandage nine of the missions were absolutely ruined. In 1843 Mexico restored to the church the mission edifices and a small area of land, the San Fernando mission receiving seventy-eight acres of the original principality, and Father Blas Ordaz was put in charge. But in 1845 the last Mexican governor of California, Pio Pico, or as the padres designated him, "Impio" Pico, issued a decree that the mission properties should be rented or sold for any sum that could be obtained, to aid Mexico in prosecuting the conflict with the United States; and the Mexican government subsequently approved of the piratical Pico's act, notwithstanding the government had restored the mission buildings to the church two years before. From 1846 to 1856 the status of the mission properties was uncertain, but directly thereafter they were confirmed to the church by the government of the United States.

The rule of the padres was despotic but efficient. The lash was made scarcely less use of than the Litany. Quarrelsome husbands and wives were sometimes chained together and released only when they had become companionable again. The padres stood in "loco parentis" to the neophytes.

To this day the sheltered and commanding site of the San Fernando affirms the wisdom of the thrifty and far-seeing man under whose direction willing

neophytes knelt before its first crude altar and put together the first "enramado," which after a short interval was replaced by the massive buildings around which one of the most valuable mission properties in California was developed. The soil was fertile, the climate more seductively salubrious than an Andalusian May, and the fig and the lime, the olive and the pomegranate and the grape thrived and the flocks of sheep and the herds of cattle and horses multiplied and fattened as if particularly bountified by Providence. By 1819 the neophytes numbered nearly eleven hundred, the animals tens of thousands and the orchards and vineyards covered hundreds of acres. The mission buildings and gardens were of vast extent, as the almost complete ruins still attest. The two main edifices were the monastery and the church; the former about three hundred feet long and the largest in the state, is still fairly preserved, due to restorations made by the Land-marks Club; but of the latter only the cracked and weatherbeaten walls and the leaky roof mutely protest against despoiling and defilement. The mission property of San Fernando, together with the other princely monastic estates, presented a temptation which the avarice of Mexican governments could not resist, notwithstanding their three centuries of ingrafted Catholicism. In 1834 all California missions, with an aggregate wealth of many millions, were declared to be confiscated to the state. Rather than surrender these rich fruits of their thrift and pious zeal the padres and the neophytes themselves not only wrecked the chief buildings, but destroyed hundreds of acres of their orchards of orange and fig and olive, uprooted miles

of their precious vineyards, slaughtered thousands of their cattle and secreted portions of their treasure. Mexico had believed she could retain what was in reality the slave labor of the thirty thousand Christianized Indians, who possessing but little of the warlike temper of the Arizona tribes had yielded with comparatively feeble resistance to the persuasions and commands of the Franciscans. They hewed massive timbers in the Tejunga mountains and with the aid of oxen dragged them over rocky and sandy ground that smoothed and polished the roof beams for the mission edifices. They made the adobe bricks and erected the mission buildings and the garden enclosures, they toiled and sowed and planted and harvested and gathered the mission grapes and pressed the mission wine and sheared the thousands of mission sheep and prostrated themselves before the mission altars and obeyed the mission padres with all the unquestioning subservience of the simple-minded and servile and nomadic people that they were. Neither the Catholic church nor the American land-possessors can justly be reproached for the fate of them, because they had no more title to the land than the roving bands of wild goats that the padres found. They were merely tribal and without government, mere wandering and temporary occupants. Mexico had hoped to hold them at the missions and enjoy the usufruct of their labor, but she misunderstood their disposition. The act of secularization broke the pride and the spirit and destroyed the interest of the friars, and the neophytes gradually dispersed; despoilment and neglect then came swiftly, and long before Father Leon was assigned to the San Fernando parish, the

devastation of the once magnificent property was everlastingly and pathetically complete.

From the secularization to his coming the prestige and importance of the mission had steadily declined. Nearly all the Indians had died or wandered away into the mountains or found mean lodgment in squalid brush tenements along the river-courses. A marcescent patriarch who was a San Fernando neophyte nearly ninety years ago—Jorge or “Horhe” in Spanish—was still dwelling in Little Tejunga canyon in 1903, the sole survivor, as far as known, of the neophytes of the first decade of San Fernando mission's glory. The mission service was intermittent and inconsequential, and all currents of life and interest sluggish, the mission buildings partially dismantled, the decorations defaced and faded, the candelabra on its altar but irregularly lit. Priests of mediocre mind with souls less aflame doled out an innutritive kind of Christian tutelage, a thin and unassimilable Catholic pabulum, well suited enough a Christian diet perhaps for the fragments of uncomprehending and thriftless Indian descendents who lingered in the vicinage, but little effort was directed to even rudimentary enlightenment and education. The pride and the glory and the ignescent spirit of indefatigable proselyters had departed forever. The spacious patio no longer echoed the footfalls of laboring neophytes, but had become a playground for frisky ground-squirrels, a habitat of vermin that prey by night, and resounded with the lonely nerve-racking bark of the prowling coyote; the prostrate columns and arches of the once stately cloisters eloquently appealed for reverent restoration, and the mission fountain that had sparkled in the earlier

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century's sunshine was athirst for the waters that would never flow into its dusty basin again. The thousands of feet of high adobe walls that sequestered the mission gardens were broken and dissolved by the rains of a third of a century, and the olive-quadrangled gardens themselves defoliated and devastated had become a pasture for swine. The demarkation of those once aromatic gardens is still plainly defined by olive trees and monumental palms that were planted by Father Lasuen more than a century before. Vandalism and neglect had done their defiling office, but neither uncultivation nor inattention nor fire itself—that burned many a faithfully fruiting trunk even into the ground—could conquer the defiant determined productivity of those ancient and almost sacred olives that sprouted even from their incinerated roots into bearing trees again. The mission holdings when Father Leon was put in charge embraced but a shrunk modicum of the once extensive domain, a miniature estate that had been confirmed to the church by Washington authorities after the Americans acquired the then unappreciated empire of the mysterious southwest. The bells of San Fernando mission no longer called the pious hundreds of the days of 1820. A roistering and irreverent soldiery of Mexico quartered to enforce the secularization had desecrated its altars, made gun-wads of its precious manuscripts, and flung upon the declining parish many an unchristened and unwelcomed babe. The glory of the great mission had vanished, and the gray-brown edifice where Father Leon admonished his dwindling parochials was crumbling still more under inattention, and

of the ancient store-houses dissolve resistingly under assailing rains; the nave, where assembled adoring neophytes of good Father Lasuen and his successors to the last of the Franciscans, worthy Father Blas, soon to shelter only beasts of burden, the high altar to be demeaned to a manger for a horse's feed, the confessional to become a depositary for implements of husbandry, the sacristy where those guileless descendants of an ancient and almost forgotten race confided their petty tribulations to Father Leon and the padres before him, and received the priestly counsel and meekly cringed under the priestly reproach, were soon to fall to the mean office of a granary and bulge with the harvestry of the surrounding fields.

The voracious energy of Father Leon soon wrought a change. Of course he had neither the assistance nor the resources to restore the whole of the melancholy ruin, but he could repair portions of the more needed apartments. But spiritual ministration alone, mere admonishing and confession, were not enough for him. At once he became not only their spiritual instructor and the confessor of their petty iniquities, but he strove to be the embellisher of their childish understanding. He bought books and taught the children and the adults as well. He not only visited their sick and absolved their dying, but he showed them better ways to arrange their small domestic affairs and manage their simple finances. He constituted himself their father in fact in all their manner of living and being, as well as their priest and Christian monitor. As high as any man might ever hope to do, Father Leon lifted his parochials to a less sluggish, aboriginal and apathetic if no more contented level.

Then when the human nature in him began to assert itself and the fascinations of the Senorita Felicia pulled and strained at the tethers of his priestly vows, the good priest did not forsake his dependent children to dawdle away his hours in the nirvana of her presence, but in sheer distress and necessity for diversion and fortification for his thoughts he plunged more energetically than ever into the education and practical well-being of his flock. He embellished and redecorated the interior of the chapel and laid out and cultivated a garden and experimented with all manner of fruit and flower. He wrote and read, he preached, he ministered and he managed, he toiled in earth and in art and astonished all wondering Fernando with his accomplishments and versatility and industry, yet he cried for more and ever more to do.

When he observed the attentiveness of Hemperton and Senor Modeno, and measured their purpose, he quite understood that the day of Felicia's going could not be far away. The thought of it smote him like a palsy even while he invoked from On High, in those starlit supplications along the deserted highways, deliverance or more fortitude to endure.

Then the bishop's intimation of a transfer came. He told his friend the senor and Felicia, whom he called "princess-priestess and oracle of San Fernando." When they congratulated him upon the promotion, but deplored as they most sincerely did his going from among them, he said simply: "If it shall please God!" though the spirit in him shone luminous through his mobile face as light through a porcelain. But in the solitude of night he raised his eyes and his arms to the glittering stars and

exclaimed "Merciful Father, give thy servant strength!"

"Cousin Felicia says you are going away," cried the sprite Constancia running to him for a lift to the shoulder. "I do not want you to go. I think I will tell my Uncle Tobal to make you stay. I know you will stay then, because everybody always does just what my Uncle Tobal tells to do."

"Very well, my little princess of San Fernando! If your Uncle Cristobal tells me I must not go I suppose I shall have to remain."

"But do you want to go?"

"I shall be very sorry, Constancia, to go away from you, for I love all God's children, and you are one of the dearest."

"Don't you love Cousin Felicia too?"

Did he love her Cousin Felicia, too! He almost cried aloud. But being every fiber of him a man, he only said quite calmly: "Yes, little princess, I love Cousin Felicia, because she is one of God's children too," though the wrench he put upon himself to say it thus calmly swept his face with a spasm. Felicia and Don Sagasto were standing near, inarticulately delighted in this comraderie of priest and elfish niece.

"Well, if you love me and if you love my Cousin Felicia and my Uncle Tobal, why are you going away?" very imperiously, with one small finger right in his face demanding authoritatively to know.

"I shall not have to go for a long time, princess." Whereupon the princess was relieved and glad. She flung her arms around his neck and kissed him, and being lowered to earth again scampered to her waiting throne.

Ruiz, the senor's son, after remaining at home a short time, began to spend many of his days in town, consorting congenially with Senor Modeno, though much younger than the brooding Spaniard. Under the sly coaching of Modeno young Sagasto gradually underwent a change of opinion about Hemperton. Without Modeno flatly telling Ruiz that he aspired to the hand of his sister, Ruiz surmised as much, and not unnaturally approved. In proportion as the intimacy between Ruiz and Modeno increased young Sagasto's early liking for the American cooled, though he continued to be civil enough when they came into contact at the rancho and elsewhere.

Of course Hemperton quickly discerned the change in Ruiz, and sagaciously ascribed it in the main to the influence of his rival. Hemperton was not slow in observing that Ruiz was treading along wild courses and connubiating with dissolute companions, and for the sake of the senorita and the senor the American attempted in a quiet and skillful way to counteract the youth's wayward tendencies. It was manifest that the influence of Ruiz, such as it might be, would be adverse to Hemperton's hope of alliance with the Sagastos. Hot tempered as a wild cat, impatient and resentful of any suggestion of espionage or advice, Ruiz snappily spurned Hemperton's cautious admonitions and in the course of a few months proceeded to get mixed up in a sorry lot of escapades narrowly escaping a far from desirable publicity, and costing the senor quite respectable sums of money and vast anxiety.

Hemperton had reached the point where he deemed it best to postpone no longer informing Senor Sagasto of his hopes. From innate love of

combat and unregenerate relish of tormenting Modeno he would really enjoy an indefinite continuation of their present relations. There was a baser side to his nature that derived a malicious pleasure from the writhing of the Spaniard. Hemperton's cool self-assurance had increased as Modeno's self-control seemed to approach nearer and nearer to fracture. In May the American had resolved to speak to the don early in June. The middle of the month passed and he had become so confident of his footing with the daughter and had seen so little of his rival for many days that he yielded to the temptation to again postpone his declaration. He was well aware both that his mental attitude was not altogether fair to the senorita and that his tantalizing of Modeno was demeaning, under the circumstances; but Hemperton made no pretensions to particularly high-mindedness. He was altogether a very human sort of a man, moved by the same influences, swayed by the same passions and ambitions, and sensible of the same temptations as other men, rather exceptionally cynical, rather coldly calculating, ambitious, capable of strong and very firm resolutions, practical, keen, able, of marked self-possession and power of dissimulation. He could be exceedingly urbane and engaging, and he rarely permitted to himself the enjoyment of an exhibition of ill-temper. But he reveled in exciting that in others. He was never more at ease, never did he more thoroughly enjoy himself than when by a play of sarcasm and calm self-control and easy patronizing manner he was able to goad one into a heat and from a heat into a passion of temper. He shone to superior advantage when he could lash

some contentious individual into a storm of extravagant argument or denunciation. Among men about town he had a reputation for smoothness of temper and agreeableness of manner and disposition. He had inspired a wholesome respect of his force and acumen in business, and a disposition to be wary of provoking the whip and biting of his quick and caustic tongue. He could be deliberate and almost dawdling in social interchange and business negotiations, but on occasion he could rouse as if electrified and strike as hard and as swiftly as a steam-hammer; and brief as had been the period of his commingling with men he was looked upon as a dangerous person to undertake to deceive or circumvent. He was a hard hitter, and not always a perfectly fair fighter, though he was too brainy not to understand that purely as a matter of dollars and cents, leaving ethics quite out of it for the argument, as a matter of simple profit and loss—honesty paid the larger dividends. He was a fair fighter enough in the sense that he could take as well as give a blow without a squeal. If he was bested in argument his unfailing good nature and sense of humor let him down with the greatest of grace, but the besting of Hemperton was a rare occurrence. If a body got ahead of him in a matter of business, quite as rarely, he charged the difference to experience, but as a valuable asset—never as a loss.

In his relations with woman he was deferential and polished to a degree that earned exclamatory delight and a considerable portion of their tea-table attention and praise. Taken all in all he was a strong and interesting character, a person of growing consequence, a bad foe, as good a friend as a man

of cold and selfish nature able to simulate sympathy and warmth with fair success, could be. If he had been rich he might have given the people a church or a hospital and deemed himself a paragon of generosity, an exemplar of the truly benevolent spirit; but in Hemperton it would have been only another manifestation of Hemperton's profound esteem for Hemperton. As to downright generosity and upright penetrating sympathy with misfortune and suffering, the real essence of them never entered for a minute into his composition.

The prestance of him was impressive and imparted to beholders a sense of his sufficiency and his force. His hair was black and his eyes dark and steady and he could level them at a body like a howitzer. His black and bushy beard was kept not long but well trimmed, and he had a fashion of seeming to pull it together on the left side as if it were inclined to part over a thin spot and he wanted to make it uniform and unbroken.

And Hemperton was getting on; there was no doubt whatever about that. He had made himself felt. He was an adroit and busy driver and schemer and doer. He had made use of his position with the railway company to exploit some projects for himself that had eventuated well, and as silent partner in Weatherford and Weatherford he had given the head of the firm many lucriferous suggestions that had been turned to their joint account. In strict ethics Hemperton might have been interrogated with disagreeable incisiveness, had the knowledge of his private tips reached the powers; but this narrative, being entirely veracious, can tolerate no overdrawn embellishment of its characters, and

therefore it must not be forgotten that some of the subtler points in this ambitious person's ethical equipment had undergone more or less abraiding in the course of Hemperton's contact with the hard walls and stony places in his inter-relations with men. Therefore too much must not be expected of him. This truthful narrative would not be truthful at all, if it undertook to make believe that every last one of the men and the women chronicled herein were good Catholics like Father Leon, or pure-hearted and high-minded women such as that sweet and wholesome daughter of Don Sagasto. This man Hemperton, you must understand, was a compound of virtues and vices, strength and weakness, like the rest of us, no doubt, and if he was not always happy as he might have been or as virtuous and as manlike as he should have been, it must have been because he was but a man and not a superior being.

So that with his self-assurance, the deliberate calculating way with which he went about everything, and with the zest of his measuring of wits and force of character with Senor Modeno and with an intuition of the stormy scene that stormless and very sunny afternoon when Modeno's bitter chagrin and disappointment got the better of his manners and caused him to deport himself so unmanfully before Felicia; or with an instinct, possibly of his approaching triumph over the seething and imprecating young Spaniard, he suffered all of June to pass, and not until well into the moonlit month of July did his purpose become fixed at last to speak out the heart of him to the senor and Felicia.

He chose an evening after a day's hunt with the don. They had gone a little way into Pacoima

canyon, northeast from the Sagasto house, less in expectation of game than for the mere love of the ramble and the contact with nature. The day had been hot, and after the return and their evening meal disposed of, the don took possession of his favorite chair on the veranda whence his eyes could range south and west over his orchards of olive and orange, his vineyard and the mighty acres where had ripened his grain. The busy and chirruping Constancia had disappeared with her maid, and the senorita employed within the precincts sacred to her domestic executorship alone, had left her father and their guest to pipes and companionship and mellow moonlit air.

"Senor Sagasto," began Hemperton, after a pause in their chatting, "I wish to say to you what I have been for some time preparing to say. I think it will be not altogether a surprise to you, because you are too wise not to have measured some of the meaning of my frequent visits and my admiration for the senorita. I love the Senorita Sagasto, and I ask the permission of her father to pay my addresses to her. I desire to ask the senorita to be my wife."

Hemperton and the don were seated on opposite sides of the table where the pipes and papers for cigarettes and other paraphernalia dear to a smoker's comfort were always ready, together with bottles of the senor's wine. The moon was increscent and its light but hazy, and the shade of peppers and the wide roof veiled the senor's expression. He was silent a long time. Hemperton waited. He knew the don's depth of nature. He had seen a few manifestations of the power of his feelings. He knew that slumbering under that lordly and tranquil

mien was a force that could sweep like a cloud-burst or ripple like a hillside spring. He had heard the sonorous voice of the don thunder commands and censure upon shirking and deceptive dependents and he had heard the same trumpeting tones modulate in an instant to velvety and tender softness to his daughter Felicia or that imp of a niece. Rare indeed were the senor's fits of anger, but from the depths of those dark and kindly eyes Hemperton had caught lightning-plays of pent-up powers of indignation and fury that could wither like the cold north wind. He knew the senor's fondness for his daughter, and his pride in her strength and womanliness were his sublimest passions, deep-rooted in his very soul. He quite understood what this fine-fibered and high-spirited and devoted daughter must be to the lonely, wifeless man whose fountain of good nature must have been salted somewhere in the depths of him by a sorrow or a romance never told.

Hemperton waited. The senor had stopped his smoking when Hemperton said enough to inform him of all that was to come. The senor's cigarette went out, and presently dropped from his fingers. He arose and as oblivious of Hemperton as if he were miles away, walked out under the trees a distance and slowly paced to and fro. Hemperton heard the senor stop, then walk again. In the vespereal light Hemperton saw him turn his face up to the stars as in appeal, and he knew the father was not only deeply moved but perhaps lost in a sweet and sacred recollection of his own happy young manhood, perhaps invoking the memory of the dear companion of that manhood, a supplication that the spirit of her might come to him out of the inscrutable somewhere

to help him to think aright in this hour of their daughter's crisis.

Then Hemperton heard a labored respiration not unakin to a choke, and clearing of the throat, and the senor came walking heavily and slowly back to the veranda.

"Mr. Hemperton, come with me," said he, in a voice muffled with emotion, but strong and firm. Hemperton followed him to the don's bed-chamber. A light was burning. From the mantel over the wide fireplace the don took from beside a statue of the Virgin a small framed photograph and held it close to the lamp, asking Hemperton to look. Hemperton saw the face of a beautiful woman. He saw Felicia over again. He saw the full antetype of the imperious but tender young sovereign of the Fernando. He saw the same high-born features, the same unmistakable nobility of nature and mind, the same melting prideful eye and sensitive mouth.

"It is the picture of her mother," said the senor, very low, very gently. "She was killed by the Apaches—torn from my very arms—and butchered, with one of my sons. Felicia went through it all, but she was very young."

There was a silence while they looked again. "Let us go," said the senor, and he replaced the photograph.

Seated again he was still silent for a considerable period. "Mr. Hemperton, when my daughter leaves, that will be as the end of all things for me. I am not yet an old man, but my daughter is more to me than I could ever make you understand. Yet I know it must be, Mr. Hemperton, I know it must be—some day!"

The senor was silent again. Then suddenly facing Hemperton, half rising from his chair: "Who are you, sir, and from where do you come?" he demanded sternly and almost in a tone of anger and command. Hemperton was startled, but waited.

"How do I know you are a fit mate for my daughter, sir? You have come to my house many times, but can I say to myself and to my daughter that I know you? Your manner is that of a gentlemen. We have made you welcome. I have been glad to greet you a frequent and honored guest. I have never requested you to give me credentials. We do not ask many questions of our guests, perhaps not enough, Mr. Hemperton. A Castilian's hospitality is not qualified, sir, without abundant cause. I am of a race of great men, Mr. Hemperton, though I am not a great man myself." The senor had risen while speaking, and stood towering before the man waiting there. "My family is diminishing. My wife is dead. My mother and my sisters are no more. Once, sir, there were many of us. Some of our people were killed in battle, some were lost on the seas. My people have an illustrious record, Mr. Hemperton, but few of us remain. I am almost, indeed I am quite alone, save my son, my daughter and my niece. Who are you that you presume to ask for the hand of a grand-daughter of a grandee and a minister of Spain?"

The senor's voice had risen in feeling and intensity but not in volume. It was strong, stern, peremptory. He stood directly over Hemperton. His manner was awesome, his figure almost a menace. Hemperton could nearly see the flash and he could feel the very force of those grave, penetrating,

fearless, interrogating eyes, and he was momentarily abashed by the transfiguration of the lofty form almost glowering before him. He knew the senor's habitually calm demeanor sheltered a reserve of tremendous power, but the force that emanated from across that dim veranda enveloped him like an electric rush, and for a space quite paralyzed his power to speak.

"Senor," he answered, quietly but steadily, "I have little to say. We have no titles in America. My father was an eminent lawyer in his day in New York. Both my father and my mother are dead. I have no brothers or sisters. I am making my own way. I have not much money, and but little land. Yet I shall be a rich and a successful man."

Hemperton's quiet, self-contained and impressive manner, more than what he said, was effective. The torrent of the senor's emotion, released as it had but seldom been, had largely spent itself, and Hemperton's quiet reply was wisely made. Its effect upon the senor was soothing and reassuring.

"I ask you to pardon my outburst, Mr. Hemperton. I have spoken with more emphasis than I had intended, no doubt. I am not often so moved. You come to me a comparative stranger, and ask for my only daughter's hand."

The don was silent again, and still standing but his manner much more composed. He turned and walked to the edge of the veranda and looked out into the night a little, then faced about again and said:

"Mr. Hemperton, I shall not interfere. It shall be as my daughter pleases, whether it be you or another. I do not know. But I understand it

must come. I think you will be a successful man, and I believe you are honorable. Good-night."

The senor abruptly went into the house. Hemper-ton remained a long time on the veranda smoking and looking straight into the night. The unspeakable peace of the valley should have filled his soul with its serenity, but on the contrary he was sensible of unusual disquietude. He preferred to ascribe it to the solemnity of the hour. He was immeasurably relieved that the senor's inquisitorial probing had stopped just as it had. If the senorita did him the honor to accept him he resolved that he would give her no reason for regret. There was that affair of inconvenient recollection; but the thing for him to deal with, under the circumstances, was the prospect before him here in Southern California. It was better for her as well as in every way well for him that the senorita accept him, Hemperton, instead of one of those unambitious, unachieving young Spaniards, unworthy of a woman of her high spirit. Suppose, though, when the test came that racial pride and family influence should prevail with her, and wreck his landless, nameless self and all his hopes on the shoals of his unlineaged descent? The thought of it made him quaver, on the very brink, as he now was, of knowing all. He had come to be exceedingly fond of this magnetic woman, as ardent as a man of his cool nature could ever be. He fully understood her immeasurable superiority over himself. Deep down under the encrustations of his worldliness and his love of self he might have longed—as other natures with thicker and thinner streaks of ethical infirmity running through them surely must—to attain a vague, idealized kind of godliness,

were it not so pleasureable to be just a weak and every-day sort of a sinner. He knew that Felicia's standards would considerably overreach his. In the depths of those lustrous and fearless eyes he could read not only courage and fidelity and the capacity for a love for which men might foreswear their very souls, the very limit and completeness of love, but also that neither variableness nor shadow of turning from a sense of right and wrong once fixed. Her beauty was extraordinary, and he was proud of it. She would radiate love, he knew, and she would demand all that her own superb womanhood and all that the pride of her passionate race could demand and had a right to demand from a husband. But she was no mere Castilian coquette to be fed with the consuming baubles of passion and dealt with as if she were a Carmen. In return for the pricelessness of her love her standards must be lived up to; or love as passionately as she might, her life would be utterly incomplete and unsatisfied. Could he? Would he? Was he capable of soaring to the heights where the white wings of her clear soul sustained her? Thought of her made him reverent and adoring, sitting there in the starlight, thought of loving and of being loved by such a woman suffused his misshapen soul like a radiance, and both humbled and lifted him up; and in that brief starlit hour, alone, all alone with his conscience, his memories, his love for her, his measure of the high-mindedness of this woman—alone with his love of her, his hopes, his resolutions and his God—Wayne Hemperton was a better man than he had ever been, better than he would ever be again perhaps, even through the earlier years of their content,

through the somberness of their future; thought of her melted for the hour the iciness of his ungenerous nature, kindled within him the flame of hopeless desire that he might have been more worthy, and so smote him with a more smarting chastisement than he had ever experienced, that under the whip and sting of its lashing he arose and almost strode away into the night and away from Fernando forever, away from the insuperable temptation of his love of her!

Almost, but not quite! Almost, but at the very last, when the brief hour of his levitation had passed and left him alone again with his selfishness and his calculating purposes and ambitions, he knocked the ash from his long sparkless pipe and went with firm lips and triumphant and resolute heart to dreams of her.

CHAPTER VII

In The Rose Garden

DON SAGASTO and Hemperton spent nearly all of the following day exploring for possible water development in the canyons of the Santa Susanna and Scorpion mountains fifteen miles westward from the don's residence. No reference was made by either to the conversation of the previous night. The day was hot. The mountain defiles into which the don penetrated indefatigably were stifling. If Sagasto could take things easy with his cigarettes and his wine on the cool veranda so could he be strenuous and driving if necessity arose. He rode hard and he felt the heat, but his imperturbable good nature remained ever with him. Hemperton's experience in the saddle had toughened him, but he marveled at the don's endurance of the sultriness and the hill-climbing, and the ease with which he made his horse leap over deep arroyos or dry gullies and explored into the oven-like gulches. Hemperton was glad enough when the don declared he was ready to turn back, and still more pleased when they passed the mission church and trotted lazily up the pepper-lane and halted among that forest of wagging tails and lolling red tongues of the hounds. There was a masterful St. Bernard called "Padre,"

the particular pet of Felicia, with which Hemperton had more readily established relations of reciprocity and mutual admiration than with the hounds. And it was Padre's great plummy oriflamme of a tail that regularly heliographed a welcome to him approaching by way of the mission and the pepper arcade, and quite as regularly wigwagged its "come again" as long as he remained in sight departing.

The afternoon was well along as they dismounted on the north side of the quadrangle and passed their bridles to the attendants. They laved their hands and faces in the spring water that spouted from a wooden trough into a metate placed for the particular convenience of the dogs. Then they straightway stretched their legs in their accustomed chairs on the veranda. However heated those valley afternoons may be in July and September, the sea air begins to prepare one by four or five o'clock for refreshing slumber through nights that are never too warm. After the evening meal, served under the knotty live-oak in the patio, the don smoked a few cigarettes, with Constancia vibrating between his knee and the lap of Father Leon, who had ridden in with the senorita from one of their errands of joint priestship. Father Leon animatedly discussed a project, which he had often contemplated with interest, to restore the highway, "El Camino Real." "I fear it cannot be accomplished for many years, Mr. Hemperton, but I wish that you would submit the idea to your influential friends in the pueblo. I hope that I may live to see every mission from San Diego to San Francisco bay connected by a well-constructed highway following as nearly as may be the original 'Camino de derradura,' or bridle path, beaten by

the early padres, the ancient 'King's highway' which you have heard about. I have no doubt that it will be undertaken in the course of time. It would be one of the most famous and picturesque thoroughfares in the world. If a plan were properly matured I believe the land-owners along the old 'Camino' would attend to its construction themselves."

Sagasto and Hemperton coincided. The don said that the padres had had two well-traveled lines of El Camino Real through San Fernando valley, as there had been more inter-communication between San Gabriel and San Fernando missions than between any others in the old-time Southern California.

Later, while Father Leon and Don Sagasto continued their conversation, Hemperton and Felicia strolled into the rose garden.

"If I were Father Leon I know what I would do," she exclaimed in response to his praiseful comment on the priest.

"I am curious, senorita."

"I would insist upon another parish or I would leave the priesthood. It is too great a sacrifice for such a man as Father Leon to spend his precious days teaching the stupid Indians of this parish. Why, Father Leon is the noblest soul I ever knew, and he is very brilliant. I told him again today what I have a hundred times already, that I think the bishop must be jealous of him or he would not require the priest to stay here."

"I quite agree with you, senorita, but is it not rather audacious for you to criticize the bishop? Don't you think you should be just a little bit afraid of him?"

"Afraid! Humph! Did you ever know a Sagasto

to be afraid of anyone? But of course you never knew any Sagastos except our little family. My grandfather Francisco Sagasto was not afraid to defy his king. No doubt I do shock dear Father Leon dreadfully sometimes, but it grieves me to see him wasting his brains and his years among these people. Today when I said it he put a finger to his ear and declared that he must not hear."

"Well, you know he is to be transferred to the pueblo this autumn."

"What of that? That is not enough of a promotion. He should be a bishop. He should be transferred to the City of Mexico or San Francisco or to one of your large eastern cities. If I were as great a man as he I would not be satisfied here. I shall tell the Bishop what I think about it! Ah, yes, I must let you know—Father Leon says you are making a heretic of me," with eyes brimming with mischief.

"Do you fear my influence?"

"Are you really trying to make me a heretic?" archly.

"I would convert you if I could, senorita, but not into a neophyte of that kind."

"Now I wonder whatever you are going to say. You must have had a Castilian ancestor somewhere, because you have a way of saying the most gallant and flattering things, quite like our own young men. I wish the Spaniards were more, more what do you call it? more ambitious, and, more—yes, I will say it, more like you! I suppose you mean to be the leading man of all Southern California?" Her hands were clasped behind her, and her face slightly upturned. She glanced saucily at Hemperton.

"Not so much as that, senorita, but I confess I am ambitious."

"If I were a man, though I am not at all sorry that I am not, I would be glad to measure wits with you, sir, in a race for success. It makes me almost angry because none of our young Spaniards undertake to do what you young Americans are doing. I tell them so, but they do not like it. They merely laugh and reply that a Spanish maiden should not be ambitious. I say to them it would not be necessary for Spanish maidens to be ambitious if the Spanish men were more so. I tell them they should be ashamed to let you Americans drive them from this country as you are doing!"

"If there had been more Spanish maidens like you, senorita, the American conquest would have been undertaken long before it was."

"If there had been more Spanish men of the mind of some of us Spanish maidens I dare say, sir, there would have been no American conquest at all!" She drew her head up and turned her firm little chin defiantly toward him.

"Had your armies been only half as large, senorita, but composed of women such as you, our entire American force must have capitulated at sight."

"That was a pretty speech, and I would have to think you a very frivolous person if I had not heard you talk so seriously with my father."

"Senorita, perhaps I can be light hearted enough upon occasion, but never was I more serious in all my life than I am tonight." He moved nearer and took her hand. Breath of the ocean comforting as a mother's love, breath of the mountains and the valley herb-scented and dewless, mellow as the

moonlight strained through the purple haze of early night, fanned the stray locks of her temples and made the hour an ecstasy even had they not been sipping at the fountain of youth and love. Perhaps awakening love itself—who may dispute?—had wrought its infinite miracle to attune to tenderest chords the symphonies even one less than a lover would hear in that dulcifulous voice, to light the jeweled lamps of angelic passions in those lustrous eyes, to fill and perfectionate with its ebbs and tides the contour of that maidenly figure, to expand and to ennoble with its raptures and its romancings the concepts of that pentrant and wholesome mind!

“Felicia, in all the ways that a man may tell without words I have tried, during the months, to have you understand something of what you are to me. You are too much of a woman not to have seen that I have dared to dream, Felicia, to gaze far aloft to the possibility of your love. It is not the adoration of a lad I bring to you, Felicia, but the love of a man old enough to know his mind. Nowhere have I ever seen so exquisite a being as you, nowhere a woman who, in all the attributes of that complete and faultless creation by which men are sometimes reminded of the sublime possibilities of human nature, approached in perfection your incarnate womanhood. Were I a Castilian lover I might sing to you of the glory of your eyes and the music of your voice. Exquisite exotic of a woman that you are, rarer than your perfection of person is the flower of your mind and the grandeur of your character! Sweet as it would be, Felicia, to sing as a lover in Spain would sing to your beauty and your grace, it is infinitely a dearer privilege to be able to come beside you as I

do now, and take your hand in mine, Felicia, as I do now, and look into your face as I do, and tell you, sweetheart, as I do now, that with all the heart and soul of me, I love you! I love you, Felicia, I love you!"

The shapely sun-browned hand was not withdrawn. To woo a woman such as she would summon from obscurest and inusitate resources of the soul all the finer nature of even a more transgressing man than Hemperton, and this rare daughter of Sagasto had struck chords in him that vibrated contrite and unmeltable resolve. If he but win her! If he but win this glorious, adorable woman!

"Felicia, Felicia, angel, can it be?"

"Ah, this then, I see, is the converting you had in mind!" with mischievous eyes, still permitting him to retain her hand. "Is it thus that all you Americans go a proselyting?"

"I would convert your heart to love, Felicia, but leave your beautiful faith undisturbed. I have been proselyting for your love these many months."

"How I have been misled! Truly, sir, I thought you came because you found my father so companionable. How could I dream you were devoting so much thought to me," with bewitching archness.

"I have thought of no one else, Felicia. I have adored you by day and dreamed of you by night! Every hour of our horseback rambles over these sunny hillsides, every hour by day and by starlight on the dear old veranda has been precious beyond all telling because you were there."

"I did not know that a man with so many ambitions to be great could spare the time to think so much of a simple girl of the valley."

"The days when I was not near you, Felicia, were

incomplete and sunless, and the hours of our comradeship too few. Since the first time I saw you I have known there could be no peace for me till I might win your love."

"Then you really came to see me, and not altogether because you enjoyed companionship with my father?"

"Really, angel of a woman, to you I came. Can you look me in the eye and say to me that you have not at all understood that I have been loving you most devotedly?"

He put a hand on her arm and gently turned her to face him.

She raised her eyes and for a second looked with simulated seriousness into his.

"I can, sir, you see; truly, I did not dr---," then the imps began to dance and the roguery to play around the mouth. "Well, perhaps I did sometimes think you, well—that is perhaps—did not entirely dislike me."

Was it ever in masculine flesh and blood to behold such maiden witchery and not fall prostrate before its spell?

"Distraction of a woman, you knew that I adored you! Or if you were in doubt you know it now and forever more! Here and now I place it all before you, the penned-up love of all the months, the suppressed joy of the sweetest association that ever blessed a mortal, unworthy man! I would have said it to you long ago Felicia, but dared not until I had reached the point where I knew I would be successful enough in my affairs to justify me in asking for the hand of the Senorita Sagasto as my promised wife. I had my way to make, and I shall make it.

I could not have presumed, struggler as I was in this new land, to ask you to ally with an unstarted though ambitious man, you the daughter of a proud Sagasto. That is why I have waited. But now I know I shall succeed, and now therefore I come to you with a strong, adoring love, Felicia, and I ask you, dear, may it not be? Can you not promise it?"

"I—I think you are a good man," very softly.

"Unworthy though I am, unworthy the best man in all the world, Felicia, yet I would be very good to you, dear one! Tell me, whisper it, sweetheart, whisper it! May it not be?"

"I think—that is—perhaps I like you—a little?" and the adorable head drooped, and the "little" was as whispered as the sigh of a baby's dream.

"Felicia!" and he would have kissed her, but she put a cool little hand between them, and with a soft coo of a laugh—"ah, senor—I shall say your name, may I—Wayne? You do not know me as you think. We maidens of Castile have stormy and whimsical tempers! Have you not read?"

"I care not—I love you!"

"We exact much, for we love much."

"Exact all you will—I care not—you shall have all you ask! I love you!"

"They say you American men are too busy to love as men of my race love. Is it true?"

"American men, Felicia, are as human as the men of Spain. But answering for myself alone I can only say that all I hope ever to do or to acquire will be for uttermost love of you."

Again he would have kissed her.

"Oh, Senor Wayne, you would act just as Castilian stories tell of Castilian lovers. You should be

different. You should be an American lover. Is that what all American young men would do?"

"No man who would not should ever enjoy the priceless treasure of a woman's love."

"Well, anyway, you may say that again"—very softly, and very archly.

"Say what again, Felicia?"

"What—what you said—before," more softly still.

"Tell you again that I love you? Tell you again, and repeat it to you by day and by night, now and forever, that nowhere on earth is there such a one as you! Aye, Felicia, I could go on telling it forever, forever and ever, dear one, and still cry for another eternity to tell it all over again! Now say to me, Felicia, tell me that it shall be!"

"Tell you what shall be?" so softly. Her head was half inclining against his arm as they stood in the sifted moonlight with roses about them in that sweet valley air, and the purple wall of the "Mother Mountains" uplifted over there in the east.

"Tell me that you will be my wife, Felicia!"

One brown hand had reached the lapel of his coat, and the brown fingers fumbled with a button. Hemperton's arm had encircled her waist.

"Would you—are you sure you would say to me many times—what you have said tonight—afterward?"

"What, Felicia, that I adore you?"

"Ye—yes," and nodding her head slowly.

"You would never become tired of having me tell you that I love you?"

"I think women who—love—like to be told—always—that—about—about love."

"Then you love me, perfection of a woman?"

Her shining eyes looked upward into his, and even in that imperfect moonlight he could read the courage and the love and the strength and the nobility of the pure soul deep down there in their depths. She raised her hand to his shoulder, drew closer and said slowly and very softly:

"I will be your wife, Wayne," and kissed him.

Hemperton bowed his head almost like one in pain, and Felicia felt a hot tear upon her hand.

"Why, Wayne—you are crying are you not! Are you not happy after all?"

"Aye, Felicia, Felicia, tears of happiness; the happiness, the unspeakable happiness that comes to a man in the benediction of love of such a woman as you!"

Starlight and the call of the wild things in the mountains, and incense of many roses, and the peace of the valley and the tawny hills, peace of earth and tranquility of the heavens to which brave Father Leon made nightly appeal for strength, and the unspeakable joy of the love of youth swept their hearts like a psalmody from an unseen choir.

By agreement the lovers met in the rose garden again soon after sunrise. An early July morning in the upper San Fernando was in that period, as it is today, a miracle in lights and shadows and shadings of blues and opals and golden grays and duns, of mountain up-lift and valley vistas and far-away simulacra of shapes to be forever photographed upon the beholding eye. In the years long after Hemperton recalled the enrapturing scene that spread away before him eastward and westward and south to the diaphanous gateway of the San Fernando.

Felicia stood beside him in the white gown she knew he loved most of all, and she plucked a single rose of red and pinned it below her throat.

"Felicia, you are radiant as a rainbow."

Felicia's eyes shone appreciation, and the fondness of her heart. Concealing her mischief-making with a simulated serious air she began:

"There is something I should have said last night, Senor Wayne," and the shadow on her face smote Hemperton with alarm. His eyes interrogated.

"There may be trouble—a little, perhaps," she said.

"Trouble, Felicia, about what?"

"About—about what you asked me last night, senor."

"Do you mean there may be trouble about your promise to be my wife?" He spoke slowly, in a low but steady voice.

Felicia was still looking at the bunch of roses she had gathered. The alarm in Hemperton's voice drew her glance to him, and she saw his face had paled. Contrite she let a smile into her eyes, and with an arch, bewitching assumption of pretended concern that Hemperton penetrated in a flash she said with a distracting turn of the head, "There is my father!"

Only her father! thought Hemperton.

"If he should object, senor?"

"If he does, Felicia?"

"Would it be right, then, what you wish?"—with a perfectly adorable smile and with dancing eyes that dazzled him.

Hemperton thought for a second he would tell her what had passed between the don and himself. Then it came to him that she would manage it all

so prettily that he determined to let her go about it in her own way without the knowledge of her father's consent.

"Shall I—shall we tell him this morning—today, do you think?"

"Tell him at once, princesa! Find him now, before breakfast, and tell him out here if you can in this glorious early light. If he consents we shall have the happiest breakfast in all our lives. If he does not—then, Felicia, I shall eat no more!"

"There is father now, there just coming from the orange grove," she exclaimed, and her radiance quite belied any apprehension of parental displeasure. "I will go to him and tell him you wish to see him. Shall I?"

"Oh, you mischief! So you propose that I shall face it out with him, do you?"

"Well, sir, I shall be here to help you, don't you see?"

She tripped over to where the don stood, and Hamperton saw that she said something, and then the don put his arm around her shoulders and kissed her, and together they approached the young man.

"My daughter says you have something to say to me, Mr. Hamperton," rather sternly.

"Yes, he said so, father."

Hamperton removed his hat, lifted Felicia's hand slowly, reverently to his lips, then straightened, still holding her hand.

"It is this that I would ask, Senor Sagasto."

The senor lifted his grave eyes to the hills, and the gloom that Hamperton had seen on his face the night before as they stood looking at the photograph crept into it again. Hamperton knew that the don

was seeing the face of the woman once more—the face of his murdered wife.

Then the don said never a word, but uncovered his head and kissed Felicia with a tenderness that made them understand all that he was undergoing. He put out his hand to Hemperton, firmly; looked searchingly, challengingly into his eyes, and then yearningly at Felicia.

“If it pleases my daughter,” he said. Then after a second’s pause—“let us go in.” That was all. But in the simplicity and the dignity of it Hemperton and Felicia knew that they were in the presence of a great and a sacred emotion.

In the course of the succeeding few weeks Hemperton made frequent visits to Fernando. In August it was decided that their nuptials should be celebrated on Christmas and that Father Leon should be asked to officiate. Felicia would have preferred to be wedded in the mission chapel; but the marriage of a Catholic and non-Catholic within the church’s domain being prohibited the great patio, if the day were sunny, would be chosen. Felicia and her lover agreed that when Father Leon had been told of it, the engagement should no longer be kept secret. As a consistent Catholic Felicia would have set the date beyond Epiphany, but made the concession to please Hemperton.

Poor brave Father Leon! Brave and steadfast as he was, fortified as he had prayed and striven to be for the inevitable termination of that unutterable sweet and well-nigh intolerably painful association, the good priest would have tottered when Felicia told him. If the bishop called him to town before the day fixed for the wedding would he do her the

favor to come to Fernando and himself unite them? Hemperton had proposed to tell the priest himself, but Felicia reserved that privilege. Her relation with Father Leon was almost that of a daughter with a father, second only to her affectionate regard for Don Sagasto himself. Had the priest not worn a frock, had he been but a man among the men of her people, Felicia might have loved him for his courage and his complete manfulness, and then this faithful chronicle of a daughter of the dons would have had a different telling.

The priest quivered as a man surcharged with an electric current, but being all a man his mastery of self betrayed nothing of the spasm that rived him save a swift surge of pallor across his face and a compression of the strong mouth.

Would he come to wed them? Aye, that he would, and proud and pleased he declared himself that she, his dear comrade-priestess; she, of all Fernando, more sovereign than he among that simple and pious folk, proud and gratified that upon him she conferred the honor, that in him she reposed the sweet and sacred maiden confidence.

"I congratulate you, my dear daughter, but more do I congratulate my friend." She had told him in her father's house, one sunny September morning, and the good brave priest took her hand in both of his, and with his soul lifted in supplication to the God who had thus far fortified him in all his long travail he invoked upon her the most solemn blessing that an unsullied and faithful heart of a priest of Rome could implore, and the fine face of him shone like the face of a martyr facing the fagots for his faith. He had come to ask her to ride with him on

one of their frequent errands, but she pled a duty at home and the priest rode away alone. And afterward, when he returned to his own quiet sanctuary he walked straight to the high altar, crossed himself before the crucified Redeemer, and bowed himself in long and solitary prayer.

The weeks fled and Hemperton plunged with augmented zeal into affairs. He had severed connection with the company, having interests enough of his own to employ his time. His engagement had become known, and this prospective alliance with the landed Sagastos fixed his social status, and at once he became sensible of the increased importance with which he was regarded.

Modeno blasphemed in Spanish and imprecated in bitter and expressive Saxon when he heard the news, and consorted more constantly with Ruiz. Sagasto's son was furious and outspoken, and even dared to reproach Felicia herself.

"What the devil do you see in this alien Hemperton?" he demanded.

"That is my own affair, sir, and I would have you to understand your conduct has forfeited all right of yours to question me."

"I hate him and all these damned interloping Americans," he burst out surlily with a snarl twisting his cruel mouth.

"You will excuse me, Ruiz," his sister exclaimed with haughty and disdainful lift of her brow and curve of her lip. "We are not accustomed to such language in my father's house." And she swept like an offended young sovereign away.

Ruiz was quite as boorish and fared quite as ill with his father, when he lodged a protest there.

"Why did you not make her wed a Spaniard?" he demanded. "Why did you not forbid this cursed American adventurer the privilege of our house?"

"Your sister has a clear and resolute mind, my son. She shall have her will unfettered, since it seems she has chosen well. You will treat the Senor Hemperton as a welcome member of our family," said the don with a quiet firmness that Ruiz fully understood to be final and not to be argued with.

More weeks passed and Hemperton's days were busily employed. The prestige of his approaching union with the Sagastos brought a multitude of congratulations, drew the attention of business men and opened wide every social and exclusive door. He was busy, contented, driving, prosperous and happy.

On a Tuesday night there was a social gathering at the Armsby home, some blocks southwestward from the business portion of town. Hemperton attended and remained till about eleven o'clock. He received no little attention and consideration as the fiance of the lovely Sagasto heiress. The November night was cool and moonless and Hemperton strode along vigorously. He thought he heard a stealthy step behind. It was rather dark under the peppers.

He half turned his head, yet walking on. Each arm was seized and that instant he felt a keen cold thrust into his side. He whirled and grabbed at two figures.

Ruiz! And Modeno!

Barely could he see enough of their features to identify them, but recognize them he did in the brief instant before he fell, crying for help.

He pulled the knife, a dagger with pearl handle, from his wound. He must conceal the weapon. He was badly cut, and he could not tell if it were fatal, yet he was losing a great deal of blood.

He must conceal the weapon—then no one but himself would know; there might be a name or initial upon it. He reached over and slipped the weapon under the edge of the sidewalk, scratched some dirt over it, and felt sure it would not be found.

He would lose consciousness if help did not come quickly. Surely, in that still night air some neighbor would hear his cries for assistance; if not he would soon be too weak to speak aloud. He tried to rise, but the weakness was mastering, and, God! how the blood was running from his side. He pressed his hand as hard as he could on the cut.

At last he would be saved, some one was coming, several in fact, from nearby houses. The hour was late; no doubt nearly all had retired. They were hurrying to the place where the cries came from.

"I am bleeding to death! I was stabbed! Open my clothes quick, and stop the bleeding! Oh, it is you Dr. Widner—how lucky! Now I am safe. Pretty deep, doctor, but not fatal, I feel, if you check the blood."

He was carried by four men, two of whom he knew. A fifth pressed a handkerchief to the wound. In Doctor Widner's house he was quickly cared for, his wound examined and pronounced probably not fatal unless it should later appear that internal organs had been injured.

"So this is the Castilian 'way'!" he thought. "Well, we shall see." And wondering thus, exhausted, he slept far into the morning. His wound

was paining and feverish now. Doctor Widner said it would be some time healing. He should not be moved. The townspeople were much wrought up over the assault, but there was no clue. Did he see the faces—could he recognize them again? No, he had recognized no one. He had heard a step and felt the thrust, and turned to fall and to see as he fell two retreating figures.

Felicia failed to receive her lover's message until late in the afternoon. As wives and mothers of her blood had done in days of old, when messages of battle and death were brought, Felicia went white, but stood as firmly as her own courage was steadfast. There would be no train till morning, but horses would take her the twenty miles in less than two hours.

"Drive, father, drive as you never drove before."

"My daughter, my brave Felicia," exclaimed the don putting a strong arm around her. Well indeed he knew he need encourage no daughter of his to self control. The lips were firm, the lovely face pale, but the heart strong and true. Ah, yes, he knew, he knew. How her mother had unflinchingly faced those horrible yelling savages, defying them with those despairing but blazing eyes!

"Drive, father, drive!"

"He will live, father, I feel that he will live. But, oh, if I were only there to help him! Please, father dear, please drive faster!"

The Senorita Felicia was expected. Word of her coming with the don had gone before. It was after seven and dark, yet Hemperton's watchers felt that the senorita would soon appear. And she did.

She did not exclaim, not Felicia, nor throw herself

upon the wounded feverish lover. She saw no face in that room but his. She saw his eyes leap to meet hers; she saw that they bore no delirium nor shadow of a fatal hurt. She knelt and said simply: "I have come, Wayne," kissed him and put her cool hand upon his forehead. "You must not talk, I forbid. You will soon be well enough to come to the rancho. Oh, my dear, my dear, my love shall make you well."

"Felicia, my angel," and with his hand between her soft palms he slept from utter exhaustion.

CHAPTER VIII

The Storm

HEMPERTON'S recovery was rapid. The wound was glancing and not dangerous. Soon the physicians were able to determine that no vital organ had been penetrated. No trace of his assailants had been discovered, and Hemperton grimly resolved that nothing, not even the possibility of another assault, would induce him to betray what he positively knew. The attack might be repeated, but he was not one to feel alarm. Soon after he was able to get about he recovered the knife from its place of concealment. He slipped it into his pocket and when he examined it later in his room it still bore a red stain and the initials "R. M." engraved in a monogram on the silver end of the handle.

"Ramon Modeno! The fool," reflected Hemperton. "In his excitement he neglected to remove this evidence from the wound."

He would return it? No; but on some opportune occasion he would contrive to filter the knowledge to the Spaniard that he possessed that criminating trinket of steel and pearl. It would be gratifying, and a measure of justice as well, to cause Modeno to squirm under the stealthily imparted secret. He would tantalize the Spaniard, play upon his con-

science and goadingly arouse his fears. Such a course might provoke the Castilian to another attack, he reflected, but he would be wary and torment Modeno subtly.

As for young Sagasto, the course with reference to him was not yet so clear, except that Hemperton decided for the present at least not to admit either Modeno or Ruiz into the suspicion that the intended victim knew of the complicity of Ruiz. He felt sure that Ruiz was too cowardly to repeat the assault.

The townspeople had been infuriated by violence upon a citizen so much esteemed, but among the multitude of causes suggested not one came anywhere within range of the truth. It was generally believed that a vicious drunken prowler had made the murderous lunge.

Don Sagasto declared that the wedding of his daughter and Hemperton should now be attended with even greater circumstance and magnificence than he had originally planned. He would have the ceremony particularly memorable. It should be the most imposing nuptials ever celebrated in "Ambas (both) Californias." In every particular of the festal program peculiar to the customs of the hospitable and lordly dons, from the bride's generous dower to the three days' feasting, the marriage should befit a daughter of the greatest of the Spanish names in all the region, and it should also be made occasion of rejoicing for the escape and recovery of the forceful son-in-law whose abilities the don undisguisedly admired; and already the event was a theme for social discussion and lively anticipation.

Early in December when the bishop called Father Leon to be his chief assistant in the pueblo, that

epictetian and militant exemplar of the faith rejoiced not audibly, and only said "As God wills," but gratification shone luminous through the dark eyes and the face of him glowed under seraphic visions and with the ignescence of a high resolve.

The heavy-witted little band of parochials who had felt and loved the mastery of the man whose approachability and humanness were entirely within their appreciation, and whose superiority of mind they instinctively recognized but comprehended not, showered tears of affectionate regret as the priest addressed to them his fatherly farewell and admonished them to equal obedience to Father Antonio, the successor, whom he introduced.

All save one, Ysabel, who waited and watched by a cloister pillar while the others crowded about and kissed the hand of the departing priest and implored and received his "benedictions." Ysabel saw not them. She saw only the strong and reliant man with the dark and solemn eyes, the compassionate but manly mouth.

The priest presently observed and slowly made his way to her, and put out a hand. She looked timorously into his face, knelt and kissed the hand adoringly. The priest put his other on her head, blessed her and moved on. Ysabel remained kneeling and pressed to her lips the hand that had touched his, but shed not a single tear. When she straightened Father Leon was well on his way to the station, the whole devoted and lamenting little flock following and invoking blessings upon him.

"He is indeed a great and a holy man," thought Ysabel.

The priest had forgotten, but as Ysabel bent over

his hand he then remembered how this untamed creature, possessed of a kind of ripe and sensuous beauty, had from time to time hung about and gazed raptly at him as he talked; how once she had heard him express a desire for some unessential but supellectile article for the altar; how she had a day or two later presented it to him; how she had radiated under his appreciation; how afterwards he had learned that she had trudged the twenty miles to the pueblo and back again to get it solely to please him; how once she had flung her beauty at him in wild and almost cleopatran suggestiveness, how he had taken her hand and tactfully led her mind away so delicately, so considerately, so naturally as if understanding that her torrent of feeling had overflowed from quite a different fountain, till the tempestuous nature had calmed, and thereafter she had regarded him with reverent and wondering awe.

In December the great storm broke over Southern California, the like of which men who were then old remembered not one that had been its equal in violence and duration. The visage of the heavens, almost invariably serene, scowled with the fury of a harsher clime.

Between April and November rain was neither expected nor welcomed in that region; but from about November to the last of March, comprising the winter season, showers and rain storms were necessary and more or less frequent. The great storm of that December began timidly, as nearly all rains do in the region between the Sierras and the sea. Not with the detonating phalanxes of tumultuous clouds and bellowing hurricanes that swoop down upon the plains of Kansas and the prairies of Illinois,

but with the gentle insidiousness of a fog. The wind blows but softly in Southern California, as a rule. The mighty air-sweeps of the Mississippi valley and the violent trade winds of the upper Pacific are all but unknown from Santa Barbara to Mexico, save on the desert or eastern side of the mountains. Premonitory of rain a pale gray gossamer haze accumulates like a dusty cream across the sky, and the respiration of an infant is not less motionful than the atmosphere at such a time. Thereupon, some early mellow evening one will discover a trickle of moisture on his face, and presently note an inconsiderable patter which in another hour swells to a drenching gustless rain. And that was the way the great storm came, mistily pioneering, then an encouraged patter thickening to an earnest downpour steadily increasing till by midnight straining aerial reservoirs seemed at last to be releasing the accumulations of several over-due seasons, dense, uninterrupted, still windless, deluging! Mankind and nature fairly hallelujahed, as today when the rains fulfil the uncertain celestial program to bathe away the ashy encrustations of the summer and tardily summon from thirsty hillside and impregnated valley the indolent forces of slumbering verdure that leap forth in golden bursts of poppy bloom and reincarnation of animating green.

All night and all day, and the next night with brief slackings for augmented deluges, the great storm still stormed on until people marveled; and then satiety became alarm and the word spread that the sinuous iron track in the wilds of the Soledad had been twisted like a spider-web and miles upon miles of it wrenched from its sandy foundation and

flung contemptuously among the rubbish heaped by irate nature.

Travelers belittle the dry water-courses of Southern California where but few expose a surface stream from May to November, yet the sandiest and the driest rise to torrents in a night, almost annually when seasonal rains are normally abundant. Even the ridiculed and unriverly sand-bedded "Porciuncula" of padre times, subsequently the Los Angeles river, has flowed bank-full half a dozen times in twenty-five years, a menacing yellow foaming flood, relieving precipitous storm-swept areas in the impounding Sierra Madres.

By night-come of the third day the river was ominous and seething with indecent haste to hurl its freightage of drift and logs into the ever-unsatisfied sea. As the river emerges from the San Fernando valley it bends lazily around to the southwest, and in ages past has hewn many a new channel for its fretful surpluses through the flat and fertile meadows between the pueblo and the Pacific.

Father Leon had but recently entered upon his new parish duties in the town. He went striding and splashing through the storm all day full of the natural joy of a big, healthy, wholesome, busy man having a work to do and zealfully doing it. He had heard men say that afternoon that if the rain continued the river might overflow its banks and imperil many homes. He knew that numbers of his new parishioners dwelt in the manaced district and he felt a growing disquiet. As early darkness settled upon the town his uneasiness increased and he resolved to ascertain by personal visitation what the real danger might be. After a hurried meal, leaving

word that he had gone to the threatened section and that he might not return till late, he hastened through that steady pelting but ever windless downpour, impressed that his services would be needed. About eight o'clock a messenger arrived at the parish house with a request that he attend a meeting of the pueblo executive and others to devise ways and means to succor the people whose dwelling places were being destroyed. Reply was made that Father Leon had already gone to the aid of his threatened parishioners more than an hour before.

What could his single-handedness accomplish, he thought, as he looked upon the ruins so imminent, as he heard already the gurgle of rushing waters and the splash of undermined walls. Swollen by the accumulating contributions from a thousand slopes and mountain canyons that impatient yellow torrent, black in the night-time, foamy and furious, thrust a tenuous experimental arm across the right bank, found the way easy and shorter to the sea, then poured a re-enforcing volume straight through the adobe quarter, swift, lashing, gurgling, unopposable, voracious! Adobe habitations, soaked and beat upon by the encroaching waters, crumbled like huge cubes of sugar, and speedily dissolved away into shapeless mud. The problem of rescue was appalling. The chief damage was being wrought on the opposite side. There the current was swifter, there it gnawed more relishingly into the yielding walls. Rain was still unabated, and the night was as black as inscrutability itself, save for feeble and intermittent lanterns dangled by rescue parties and awed spectators. The business of removing imperiled people had already begun, but momentarily was

becoming more difficult as the current augmented in volume and swiftness.

Cries for help came piercing to him through the rain and the night; and the evidences of destruction unseen and but imperfectly audible impelled him to action. He knew the entire section between the higher ground where he stood and the river half a mile east must be inundated. He knew there could be no place for refugees to retreat to for safety except rare upper stories or the house tops. In stagnant or but slowly running waters even adobe walls would endure a time, but if that current should spread over the flooded district then, he realized, almost every house would sooner or later collapse.

There was but a blinded and unorganized hurrying to and fro. Men were willing, but darkness and the storm impeded and disconcerted. Only trusting that the current before him might not be too deep to ford, or that he might not lose his footing, the priest plunged in, heading toward a dim houselight across what had been a street. The water reached above his middle and the force of it almost overthrew him. The black water was three feet deep in the room. A mother and four children had placed two tables upon a bed and there had taken refuge, uttering unheard lamentations. In Spanish the priest said he would help them across the torrent; but the inmates, almost impalsied with alarm, hesitated to be removed. Fearing that the house might fall, he gathered the mother in his great arms and, assuring the children he would return for them, staggered out into the still rising flood. Barely was he able to cross. Finding two men with lanterns peering into the opposite darkness he left the woman

with one, while the other promptly joined him as he recrossed. Together they bore the children, and no sooner had they returned to the mother than a corner of the vacated house fell, then its front wall and the roof. As the priest was recrossing a sodden thing floated against him; he stooped to push it away, but feeling it to be a small human body he lifted it out of the water, and making back to high ground was horrified by the face of a dead girl. He groped about in the rain till he found help, passed the burden, and again plunged in.

Lights were now multiplying along the high side, and rescuers were busy in increasing numbers. The priest worked on, guiding frightened and dazed men, ferrying women and children, encouraging and directing; strong, calm and tireless.

Once he stepped on an uneven stone, rolled entirely under the muddy water, feared that he might not regain his feet, but did so by main strength. Still the rain poured. The flood seemed not to rise after midnight, but it coursed more swiftly and numerous houses had collapsed. In some the occupants were terrified into apathy and declined to move. Not a few protested when the priest undertook to transport them bodily. How he rejoiced in his splendid sufficing strength; but even he was becoming sensible of the strain upon his endurance, and there were yet many to be succored.

Hours after midnight he forced his way into a dwelling but faintly lighted, built upon somewhat higher foundation. The water was but a few inches deep on the floor. Two female persons in revealing gauds and rouge, betraying the blanch of unsleeping alarm beneath the red, sat tearfully on a bed.

Glasses and bottles and the room's disorder told the character of the place.

"The priest," they thought. "Will he help us?" Yes! The priest would aid even them. He bade them wrap themselves warmly. He would carry them. The house might not be destroyed, but there was danger. Would he turn them over to the police? No, he would assist them to shelter and safety. When both had been ferried in the priest's arms they informed him that there was another person in an adjoining room. He returned. There, sprawling, partially unclad, in drunken stupor was a man. Father Leon shook to arouse him, and the embruted countenance turned maudlinly to the priest was none other than—Ruiz Sagasto!

"Come!" commanded the father, indignation and sorrow in his voice. This debauchee the brother of Felicia! This the offspring of the noble don! He could carry Ruiz across the water, but then what? The son of Sagasto must not remain unsheltered, weak and intoxicated, at such an hour. It was nearly morning and the priest felt increasing exhaustion. Why not remove Ruiz to his own quarters, the priest reflected.

"Come, Ruiz, this house is no longer safe; come! I am Father Leon." He would not tarry to argue. He lifted the stupefied youth, bore him out and put him upon his feet in the cold deep water to clear his befuddled mind. Ruiz muttered blasphemously, but the bath sobered him enough to make him think and act.

"I will take you to my house," said the priest.

He conducted Ruiz and the women to the shelter of an overhanging roof and admonishing them to

remain and watch their companion, sought a vehicle. He bade the refugees enter. The priest himself, thoroughly weary and chilled as he was, mounted the seat with the driver and directed the way to the parish house. In that dwelling were but two sleeping rooms. He directed the women to one, and Ruiz to his own, after he had roused the housekeeper who served steaming coffee. Then, taking a change of clothing to his study, he made a fire, disrobed and rubbed himself vigorously, dressed, drank two brimming cups of coffee, instructed the housekeeper to detain the women and the man till he should return, in event they stirred, and went back to the work of rescue.

It was light enough now to observe the surroundings. The destruction, while considerable, was not so widespread as he had feared. Rain still was falling, but not heavily. The current was no longer rising. Rescuers were still at work. The priest was informed that a dozen or more children and women had been drowned. Two-thirds of the adobe dwellings directly in the current had collapsed, and many in the shallower submersion had been damaged. Wreckage of furniture, bedding and garments floated on the yellow tide.

Father Leon promptly perceived there remained little more that he might do there. The worst was over. He wearily returned to his house, flung himself on the couch in his study with his feet to the fire, and slept. When he awakened the sun was streaming in. Hearing him stir the housekeeper brought coffee and refreshments and inquired solicitously after his condition. Possessing great strength, health and endurance, the priest's long

hours of exertion and exposure had not affected him beyond mere exhaustion. Now he was thoroughly refreshed and as fit as before that dreadful night. His first thought went to the unfortunates sheltered under his roof. The disposition of Ruiz was a simple matter, but how about the women? He must see and attend to them first. Had they arisen yet? Perhaps they were awake but reluctant to see him or the housekeeper, perhaps apprehending a long going-over, or even the police. He directed the housekeeper to ascertain if they were awake, and if so, to ask them to come to his study when they had breakfasted.

Presently they came, humble, abashed, and wondering that this man of God was so gentle with them; this strong-armed man who had borne them like children across that flood. Wondering what he might now say, almost dreading, indeed expecting, that he would bid them begone, they stood before him. They did not know his name. They only knew that he was a priest and a very strong and heroic man, and that frocked as he was he had not interrogated but had come to them in trouble and danger, and that he had saved them and had not upbraided them—not yet. With a courtesy that awed and amazed them he took each by the hand and conducted her, as he might a lady in a drawing room, to a seat. He uttered no preachment, he besought no mending of their ways, he indulged in no reproof. He was not even stern. His eyes regarded them without a frown; he was altogether kind and fatherly. He asked no inconvenient questions, he heaped upon them no reproach. He probed not at all into the manner of their living. He ascertained that the

parents of one dwelt in the town and where, and that she was affrighted to go home. If he undertook to secure a welcome for her, and under the same roof for the other as well, at least for a time, would both accept and there remain? Would they permit him to be their friend and adviser? His voice was gentle, his eye benignant and his unspoken appeal melted a way for him straight to their ever-wondering hearts. Both stammered a hesitating assent, moved, shamed, amazed, incredulous in the presence of this calm, courtly, unknown priest who had taken them from their iniquity and sheltered them under his own roof. And they promised to remain in the room where they had just rested until he directed otherwise.

No allusion was made to Ruiz, but they understood that he was in the house, and that they were impliedly promising the priest to avoid him. They withdrew.

Father Leon tapped on Ruiz's door, and entered. Young Sagasto was sitting up in bed. The priest took a seat beside him, and placing his hand on Ruiz's shoulder, and with all the force of his own deep, strong nature appealed to the son of his dear friend to cease his waywardness. He invoked the family name and pride, the love of his sister, to take a firm hold upon himself and rescue his self-respect and avert a disgraceful, idle future. The don's heart was being wrung. "You, Ruiz, are the last man of the name. Remember the splendid record of your ancestors; remember that if you do not live worthily of them and of your father, then the name of Sagasto will become extinct with you. There is the child Constanca, but when she weds the Sagasto name will disappear unless perpetuated by you. The hope

and the ambition of your dear old father, Ruiz, rest upon you." The priest spoke with greater persuasiveness than anyone had ever addressed to Ruiz, and when he put both hands on the young man's shoulders, and, looking him full in the eyes, adjured him in that subdued but resonant vibrating voice so full of earnestness, "Be a man, Ruiz! Be a man!" Sagasto put out his hand and replied:

"Father Leon, I am not so bad. I have been wild, it is true, but I mean to steady down. I give you my word, father, you need not worry about me again. I thank you for what you did last night. I thank you gratefully. You won't tell the senor, will you?"

The priest's eye flashed an indignant answer, and Ruiz lowered his. Ruiz would remain in that room till Father Leon brought a coat and vest, his own having been left in the flooded house.

Father Leon did not this time ask the housekeeper to have an eye upon his wards. He felt sure that all were at least for the time being, too much under the power of penitential emotion to leave their rooms without his permission. He walked briskly to the scene of the flood, finding the water now receding. Hundreds of people were grouped on the high side of the still swift current, scores among them gazing tearfully—the old men and women—across to their crumbled and still crumbling houses.

All trace of the storm had gone. The sun was shining brilliantly in a sky absolutely cloudless, the lofty mountains whence had come the deluge lifting their now snow-capped heights into the calm soft air of that perfect December day. The storm that came so timidly, as if to allay suspicion of its awful program,

had swiftly gone once it had broken and its scattered trails of ruin were inconsequential in the vast measure of the benefit it had wrought.

Word had passed about the streets concerning the heroic work of the priest who had so recently come among them, and Father Leon was conscious of being pointed out as the man who had played so efficient a part in the rescue work. As he mingled with people at the current's edge many who recognized in him the chief deliverer that had come to them out of the dark and the storm, tireless, powerful, calm, decisive and swift to act, pressed about him, blessed him, thanked him, many asking what they might now do. The bishop came, too, white-haired, quiet-spoken, purposeful. He heard with profound satisfaction of the courageous conduct of his young assistant, and was pleased with himself that he had chosen this able and bold co-adjutor for the pueblo field.

"A bishop, sometime," said Father Leon's superior, to himself.

Together they quickly agreed upon plans for relief and assistance, not only for their own people but in conjunction with other church and relief committees and with the municipal authorities.

The priest briefly told the bishop about the women then sheltered in the parish house, and his hopes for them.

"Good, my son, very good!" said the bishop, his face and eyes filled with praise and gratification. But the priest said nothing concerning Ruiz.

First of all Father Leon set about to find the parents of the girls. He discovered that they were not of his faith; but souls and not creeds were at

stake! He approached the subject with all his tact and delicacy, yet with swift, decisive purpose. They were respectable, fairly well-to-do people, members of an evangelical church. The father's face hardened as the priest briefly related how the girls had been found, not telling, however, that he was the rescuer, nor that they were then under his roof.

"She is no daughter of ours, sir, she may go her way," said the father, rising and walking to a window.

But the mother's head went up, and with dry eyes and a firm voice she exclaimed:

"She is *my* daughter, and she shall come if she will, and the other, too."

She approached her husband, taking a hand in both of hers: "Father, you cannot realize what you are saying! You refuse the gift this good man makes to us, refuse a home for our homeless girl! She shall come, father, she shall come or I will go! She shall come, and the other with her, and you will be a father to both! Father Leon," turning to the priest, "he will himself tell you to bring them. He drove her from the house, and I should have gone, too! I will go now. I will go with you to bring them. Father, husband, your heart must not shut her out. You love her, but your stubborn nature controls your better self. What is our religion, what is our fatherhood and motherhood for if it cannot stand a test like this? Will you let your wife as well as your daughter go? I am getting old, father, yet I will go to our daughter today, now, and remain with her if you say she shall not come. All these months I have implored you to find her,

yet you would not, and now I shall find her myself."

She did not weep nor did she kneel, this mother who had let her harder husband have his own hard way. Resolve came into the mother-eyes, resolve set the tender mother-mouth, and the resolute, yearning, mother-spirit defied the stubbornness that would deny a penitent child.

He would not say yes, not yet, but he said no other nay. The mother left him standing there, and told Father Leon she would go at once. And an hour later when the priest watched the mother and the girls go forth together from his door he was almost thankful, almost rejoicing, that the great storm had come.

CHAPTER IX

The Christmas Wedding

PREPARATIONS for the nuptials of Hemperton and Felicia were well under way. The month of December was advanced. For several days there had been communication between the town and Fernando only by vehicle, because a rush of the torrent down Tejunga wash had demolished nearly a mile of track and roadbed. Hemperton's wound, while permitting him to walk slowly, was still too tender to risk the jolting of horseback and not until a week before Christmas did he and the senorita meet since a few days before the storm. The ceremony would take place beneath the great oak within the patio, and thereafter would be spread a feast for the guests from the pueblo and for all Fernando region. Then the bridal pair would proceed to San Pedro for the San Francisco steamer. The don ordered that the patio should be carpeted, the walls veneered with bloom and foliage, wire or cordage drawn closely across from top of wall to wall and the fields and hillsides of all the hacienda levied upon for floral tribute to canopy the entire court.

While Hemperton was not a Catholic, neither had he anchorage in any evangelical church. His religious views were vague and unsettled. He

attended services infrequently and irregularly; more times, however, not at all. The less illiberal or rather the more intellectual pastors, irrespective of their creeds, attracted him if he were attracted at all. Father Leon had striven with earnest but never offensive persistence to draw him to Rome. Companionship had grown between the priest and the young business man, whose reading had been broad and whose mind while far from the high standard of the priest's was nevertheless well-fibered and full of understanding and capable of sympathy with the intellectual tastes of Father Leon. The men were congenial, and spent many hours together. The priest strove to attract his friend's interest to the faith. He endeavored to first awaken his mind to the profoundly absorbing historical aspect of the church, hoping by that avenue to lead him, in course of time, to abiding spiritual conviction. Hemperton, however, was wary. Father Leon was the only man upon whom he did not try his powers of contentious argument to strike sparks by his sardonic and biting tongue. While in his heart he made light of Father Leon's faith and his devotion to his tenets, nevertheless he profoundly esteemed and respected the priest above any man of his acquaintance. Rarely did he attempt the practice of any of his sarcasms upon this friend, nor did he undertake with him any of the goading and teasing to provoke outbursts of temper for the mere love of the sport, the mere enjoyment of getting the better, as he did so mercilessly with others.

The long pontificate of Pius IX was nearing its eventide, and Father Leon was enthusiastic over the progress which the faith had made under the strong

policy of his Holiness, and the priest would have felt it a triumph indeed to carry Hemperton's able mind into the fold. He deplored Hemperton's easy indifference, his lack of conviction. Hemperton denied that he was a scoffer, denied that he was even an agnostic, yet Father Leon with real pain perceived that his friend's boasted liberality was not the breadth that arises from firm and lucid convictions, but the rudderless, compassless, portless condition of mind of a man whose spiritual nature had never in fact been touched, never awakened. To the devout and earnest priest Hemperton's Sadduceeism was shocking, and he strove to bring him around to the point where he might realize his perilously irreligious condition.

But Hemperton, while entertaining a fixed scorn of what he regarded as the fripperies of the Roman mystagogy, was entirely willing that the ceremony should take place under Catholic officiation. Father Leon was the one of all others, because he liked the man, however, not because he cared a farthing whether the service were performed by priest or pastor or justice or judge. It was perfectly natural that Felicia should select Father Leon, and her lover was sincerely in accord.

The composite mysticism and asceticism in the character of the ecclesiastic greatly interested Hemperton; the poet and the martyr, the imagination of an orator, the spirit and resolution of a statesman or a commander, the vision of a dreamer of dreams, the self-effacing power of a Jesuit. He had never ceased to wonder that Father Leon could be contented within what to him, Hemperton, appeared to be the suffocating limitations of St. Peter's

church. What an army of commoner men there were who might minister as effectively and more contentedly, perhaps, and release this big-brained man to the world of big affairs!

It was not at all unnatural that there should be predictions of unhappiness in this marriage soon to take place, this union of a Catholic girl with a critic of Rome, this daughter of a long line of Catholic nobles, bearing in her glorious person the ancestral traits and habits of thought and temperament of generations of illustrious men and women nurtured in the faith of St. Peter, mating with this forceful, liberal, irreligious young American. The wise ones shook their heads, the wiser held their peace. In a mild way the Spanish people resented the alliance of this fairest daughter of their race with an alien, and though not proclaiming their objection yet among themselves they foreboded trouble as punishment for the senorita who would thus forsake her race though not her faith.

Some of the older Spanish associates of Don Sagasto even went so far as to remonstrate with him for consenting to the marriage. Senor Otero and old Don Alvarez, and one other of the five who had gathered on the Sagasto veranda not many months before to counsel among themselves as to what should be their attitude respecting the railway celebration, undertook another special and solemn embassy to Fernando, and gravely advised with Felicia's father. They had been the friends and companions of Sagasto's father; they had fought side-by-side with General Sagasto in many battles in disturbed Mexico. They presumed upon their long and very intimate friendship with the don's

father and with the don himself to confer with him; to protest, courteously of course, against this unfortunate and most ill-advised alliance. No good would come of it, they warned the don. The senorita was so thoroughly a Catholic it was almost inevitable that she would eventually become unhappy as the wife of a man who professed no faith at all, who in fact seemed to entertain a contempt for all ceremonies, and for all the forms and accessories of the worship and the faith that was dear to her and which had been a part of the very life of her forebears for many centuries. Don Sagasto patiently listened to them, but disdained to argue. He would not anger these old and loyal friends by curt reminder that it was none of their affair, nor would he undertake to apologize or defend. At heart he would have preferred that his daughter might have chosen a Spaniard and a Catholic, but he knew her resolution, her clearness of mind, her strength of character, and he believed her to be quite capable of deciding for herself, and well he knew the futility of attempting to interfere if her mind were made up. He was ambitious for her, and no young Spaniard thereabout possessed any such force and ability as Hemperton, or seemed as likely to make a place and a name and a fortune for himself as this square-shouldered and dominating young stranger who had won his daughter's heart. So he declined to interfere. He was kind, indulgent and patient as they talked and argued. But he would not, he said, he could not, understanding the proud and self-reliant and resolute spirit of Felicia, oppose this marriage. On the contrary, he informed them, the ceremony should be worthy of a daughter of a Sagasto. When they

arose to depart he pressed their hands cordially, and assured them that he accepted their confidence and their advice as manifestations of their affection and respect; but he was firm.

As the date of the wedding approached Hemperton wondered what Senor Sagasto had done or would do in the way of dower for Felicia. He hoped the don would speak of it again. Once, only once, Sagasto had said his daughter should be well provided for. He proposed, the senor said, to deed to Felicia half the hacienda. He did not say whether this would be done before marriage or afterward. Hemperton wished that the deed might be made and recorded before. He could not have explained very logically why he desired this, but he was conscious of the fact that he did desire it. He had plans in which the disposition of the land which the senorita would probably receive would be of importance. Her father might as well make the deed one time as another. How much more convenient if the don would make it direct to him, because of course Felicia would transfer it to him after their marriage.

As it eventuated, a few days before Christmas Senor Sagasto went to the pueblo and executed a deed to twenty thousand acres in favor of his daughter. He met Hemperton and requested that he accompany him to a notary, before whom the signature was then acknowledged. Together they proceeded to the little old yellow court house, where the don recorded the instrument. Hemperton was gratified, but made no comment. The intense self interest in his nature was in full play again. He was indeed prospering, now. He would presently sever his silent partnership in the firm of Weatherford and

Weatherford. As the possessor of half the Sagasto hacienda he could not afford a connection with Colonel Denby Weatherford. The colonel had been useful to him, but could be so no longer. As a member of a great landed family he must seek affiliations that would confer more prestige than the over-blown senior partner. With these acres which Felicia would bring to him he might consider himself a fairly rich man.

Two days before the wedding the senorita came to the pueblo to make some final purchases. Hemperton desired to lead her mind around to the subject of the deed, without seeming to do so, for a purpose. She might volunteer to execute a deed to him at once, even before marriage. They were together awhile, in shopping, and Hemperton casually referred to some land which he was about to acquire.

"We will take a trip to Europe, Felicia, out of the first profits," said he. "I think I shall be able to make a great deal of money from the small pieces which I now have, and I find myself becoming very ambitious for more."

"Take mine, Wayne," said Felicia. "You may as well include that."

"Oh, no, Felicia, you would be bothered about signing deeds and papers," said her lover, "if I undertook to do any business with your land."

"That is just what I desire to avoid," she replied. "And you are going to be my man of business, are you not? I want you to look after it. You may as well begin now. You know that father has just deeded to me a great portion—let me see, why I think twenty thousand acres! How do I—how shall I arrange this, so that you may have charge of

it? Can I make a paper to you as father did to me?"

"Yes, you can, sweetheart, but don't bother about it now."

"Yes," said Felicia, "I will bother about it now, once for all. I will make the paper today. Take me to father's lawyer. It will be my wedding present to you, Wayne," and she drew closer and glancing with bewitchingly assumed surprise and disappointment, said:

"Are you not going to thank me, sir, not even just a little?"

"I can't, dearest, not here! Not as I would like."

"Well, that's just the way with you women," exclaimed Judge Brecknell, when Felicia explained what she desired to have done.

"Hemperton, here, may leave the country, senorita, if you give him so much land. Surely it will turn his head."

"My head is turned already, completely," exclaimed Hemperton. "Wouldn't such a girl turn any man's head—twist it entirely off?"

The judge had written the deed that conveyed half the rancho to Felicia, and it was a brief task to make a duplicate to Hemperton. Felicia promptly signed it.

"Now, my dear senorita," said the judge, when Felicia had arisen from his chair after affixing her signature, "I desire to collect my fee at once."

Felicia's face expressed surprise. "What will it be, judge?"

"I don't want money. I will not accept mere coin. I propose to insist on a fee that is worth more than the entire hacienda of Don Sagasto." And the lawyer's rosy face revealed gallant mischief.

Felicia looked at the lawyer, then at Hemperton, then at the lawyer again, confusedly.

"My dear senorita, you are the daughter of one of my dearest friends. I knew your mother. She was the most beautiful woman I ever saw except one. You are that one. I want to kiss you, and I don't propose that you shall ask the consent of this man Hemperton, either. This transaction is between you and me, senorita, and he isn't your husband yet. If I may kiss you that will be all the fee I shall ever ask for this or any other legal business that I may transact for you."

Already Felicia had grasped the humor and courtly spirit of the old lawyer, and her eyes shone with mischief and appreciation of his fine friendship.

"Judge Brecknell, you're a delightful old flatterer. I will pay my fee, sir. You may kiss me. Wayne, you may look or not, as you please!"

The judge took her hands in his. "My little girl," said he, "I love your father. He is a good man. God bless you! and grant that you may be a very happy woman!" Then he kissed her as her father would, full on the lips. "Felicia," he said, "remember, my poor services will be at your disposal always. You have my receipt in full for life. That husband of yours," pointing a finger at Hemperton, "must pay cold cash for whatever I may do for him. But you are at liberty to come to me for advice as often as you please, free of charge, for all the future." And the ruddy, shrewd face beamed like a July sun.

Hemperton put the deed in his pocket. How clever he had been, he thought, to bring it about without even a request. Half the Sagasto hacienda

in his possession! A principality in itself! Even now his mind was reaching to larger plans.

The wedding day at last! Christmas in Southern California! A miracle in air and sunlight, in shade and color, in softness and tranquility, redintegrated nature and nuptial sky! The great rain had reincarnated life, and under two or three weeks of illecebrous and fructifying sunshine all the wrinkled shoulders of the hills were mantled in mossy emerald, and the valleys knee-deep in lush grain. In all America there are no Christmas days, no Christmas landscapes or sunshine comparable to the Christmas days and Christmas sunshine of those southland valleys. The broad San Fernando, the sea-bound Caluenga, the sunny and historic San Gabriel reaching far to the dim Puente hills!

Christmas in Southern California! Royal pageant of a day befitting a Sagasto bride, daughter of soldiers and grandees of ancient Spain! Christmas day, and the sun crept out of the sepulchered desert and peeped cheerily over lofty San Jacinto's polar brow incoronating it with rosy radiance that flung long arms of gold and rose across balsamic mountain forests and lit the lamps of morning on hilltops that sentineled the shadow valley to the unlighted sea. The crest of Baldy, prismatic and himalayan above the less ambitious of the Sierra Madre heads, caught the alpenglow leaping from peak to peak, set a coronet of crimson upon his own icy and majestic dome and bade the glory bathe his granite sides and gild the lessor domes beyond. Across the awakening city swept the swift illumination bejeweling tree and entorching spire, scattering largesses of color over Christmas roses, tinting pale Christmas lilies,

uncurtaining ferny mountain recesses, pouring life upon the earth, glittering out upon the placid ocean, glorifying the world!

The sun rose, and the valleys bared their willing bosoms to his caress!

The sun rose, and mountains yawned the dewless lips of their canyons to drink the light!

The sun rose, and men looked out upon their possessions and were enamored with the promise of plenty that spoke from vine and tree and sprouting grain.

Across the Southern California cloudless, windless sky this southern matchless winter sun went his summery serene and royal way, and peace and tranquility mothered celestially over the impictured land.

Ecstatic songsters warbled enrapturing carols of an eldoradan Christmas sky-shine, fat herds browsed contentedly on succulent Christmas pastures, the air was langurous with incense of floral exhalations, and the sublime calm of a sublime December day tranquilized intranquil souls and wrapt an imparadised world in adoration.

The sun descended, and the shadows of many hills stole gray and purple across the slopes, and crawled lazily up the mountain sides as they had crawled down when the morning light advanced. Baldy and Gray Back and San Jacinto put on their coronets of red and gold awhile, and far in the south the shimmer played from crest to crest again with purple and opals, flinging higher and higher and paler as the Christmas sun retreated a great glowing rubedinous globe dissolving into a waveless Christmas sea.

And so the royal pageant came and went, the royal pageant of a California Christmas sun that cleft his regal way across that nuptial sky, and bade his loyal subjects calm good-night, unfretted by storm or cold.

And so this imperial pageant of a Christmas day came and went while the bells of San Fernando mission pealed a welcome and a wedding march to the bride of the proud and ancient house of Sagasto.

And other royal pageants of Southern California Christmas suns were to come and go, cleaving their majestic way across that turquoise sky, adorning mountains and fructifying valleys and filling the hearts of men with psalmodies of thanksgiving; there were to be royal pageants of golden Christmas suns to enthral with wonder a great city that was to rise upon the outpost hills that faced the sea, but the glory of the royal pageantry of those Christmas suns was to set for the prideful house of Sagasto, go out in cloud for the daughter of the dons and of illustrious grandees of old Castile.

The humble folk grouped in whispering, wondering squads to see the great ones from the city pass into the don's welcoming mansion bepalmed without and beautified within by a thousand tapers and whole acres of roses and wild hyacinth and ferns from the canyons and red Christmas berries and poppy and orange bloom plucked from Sagasto's estate. They choked the patio doors, these dusky faces that adored the senorita, and stood there rapt and marveling as the fair daughter of the don, habited in trailing ancestral laces, tiared with orange blossom from trees planted by the friars when the century was but weaning, came, supported upon the arm of

her father, into the embowered court, to the blue silken canopy under the sheltering live oak where waited Father Leon to put her hand in Hemperton's.

Out from the senor's halls they filed again, the stolid ones, into the glory of that Juneful Christmas sun, while the pueblo guests hovered around Felicia and followed bride and bridegroom to the festal tables spread on the outer verandas.

Just before Felicia had quite prepared to pass from her own apartments to the patio the faithful Tizza, wrinkled and bronzy, with piercing eyes and a crooning way, begged the privilege of a word with the senorita alone.

"What is it, Tizza? Why do you seek me now?"

"Senorita, do not wed today."

"Tizza. Whatever do you mean?"

"Senorita, wed not the Senor Hemperton; he is not for such as the senorita!"

"Tizza, you must not say this to me! Were you not so long in our service I would dismiss you! Say no more, but go!"

"Senorita, I will go. I would not offend, senorita. But it is because I love you. You will not believe, but I know, senorita, and some day you will know that old Tizza spoke true."

On the verandas and in the trophied hunting hall the wedding guests were feasted on fruits and wine and mutton and olive from the estate, and venison and antelope and cakes and creams; while under the peppers another feast was spread for the parish folk, and never a mouth in all the mighty valley need have hungered that day, for the don bade all. And for three days more the feast continued, the don commanding that there be no toil in all Fernando,

and that every soul make merry in honor of a Sagasto bride.

And thus this other pageant came and went, this pageant for the daughter of Don Christobal Sagasto, the pageantry around the high altar of the umbrageous live-oak, the pageant that acclaimed Felicia departing from her loving sovereignty and strewed orange bloom and golden poppies before the carriage that bore her away.

The day before the wedding Hemperton placed on record the deed conveying to him from Felicia twenty thousand acres of the Sagasto estate.

Father Leon did not return with the bridal party, but remained over night at the don's house upon his urgent invitation. And well that he did. That evening Don Sagasto suffered a slight paralytic stroke, but he would not permit the priest to send word of it to Felicia.

CHAPTER X

The Dons of California

THE imperfectly chronicled story of the brief reign of the proud-spirited people who occupied the Pacific Southwest, beginning soon after the advent of the padres and enduring for over twenty-five years after the American conquest, is among the most romantic and pictureful in the annals of the republic. Fiction and poetry, legend and staid history which have so well preserved the inspiring chapters from Plymouth rock to the acquisition of Oregon and California, have yet to delineate with factful fitment the story of the Spaniards and particularly the haughty and pleasure-loving dons who dwelt in the then little known region wedged narrowly between the Sierra Madres and the sea. The Californias were an inaccessible and mysterious occident, invested in the imagination of most mankind with almost Babylonian mythicism. Following directly after the pious men who disenchanted the wilderness, and grafted Spain's antetype and Rome's ecclesiocracy upon this empire of solitude, came a landed Spanish aristocracy who found the environment to their liking and who maintained an almost ducal independence for half a century. The manner of their coming and the pathos of their extinction,

their rise and their untroubled rule, have yet to be related with the circumstance and fidelity and the romantic setting that befit their pride and their might, and it may never be. Their numbers were comparatively few. The Spanish-speaking population in Southern California was for a period considerable, but the dons themselves, the dominant families, were limited, exclusive and widely separated. There were some scores of them who boasted the pure blood of Castile. Many of the Mexicans and the commoner Spanish were a turbulent and somewhat lawless lot, but the pedigreed dons played chiefly a part of stateliness and peace and enjoyment. They lived and ruled like feudal barons, but their habits and history and authority were in the main unmarred by the ruffianism and bloodshed that ensanguined baronial times. Their domains consisted of vast grants conferred by the government of Mexico in many instances, sometimes a purchase. Their independence was undisputed. They were breeders of sheep and cattle and makers of wine, and dispensers of ducal hospitality.

While the Atlantic colonists were still piercing forests and building log homes in the wilderness and driving Indians farther and farther back into the fastnesses of the west and civilizing savage nature with the ax and the spelling book, the blunderbuss and the bible, hewing trees and red men in about equal proportion, fighting the war of the revolution and inscribing the constitution, the Pacific Coast was still sleeping its sleep of centuries. The conquest of the colonies was achieved by the eastern pioneers in their own valleys and on their own hillsides and within sound of their own dinner-horns; but the

conquest of the Pacific southwest took place more than a thousand miles from the empire for which American armies clashed with the warriors of Mexico. The conquest of the Atlantic states and the middle west and the west beyond the west was achieved in strife and blood from the massacres and maraudings among the hills of Massachusetts to the Modoc war below the Oregon line and the taking of Geronimo in southern Arizona. The progress of the Saxon from Charlestown Neck to the Sierra Nevadas was one long intermittent warfare of blood and toil, but the tranquility of California was almost wholly unbroken by battle, its eternal sunshine clouded but a few brief hours by the dust and powder smoke of marching, fighting men, its placid harbors but rarely ruffled by the prows of ships of war, its calm almost never startled by a hostile cannon's roar. There were Fremont and Kearney and Stockton, and there was the battle of San Pasqual, and some mimic fighting in the vicinity of the Pueblo de Los Angeles, but mimicry of war was all it could be called—the whole catalogue of belligerent incidents that are chronicled from the first sighting of California hills by Navigator Cabrillo to the planting of the stars and stripes on the sand dunes of "Yerba Buena," whence San Francisco was to reach forth its commercial antennae for the traffic of Asia. While the guns of Yorktown were proclaiming the birth of a nation, the stormless waters of the shipless western sea were lazily bathing a sun-baked coast trod only by the bare brown feet of tribes averse to war; and while the baby republic was lifting its head over the edge of the cradle of liberty, while the new industrial crusaders were pressing toward the mysterious west,

peaceful priests of Spain with cross and cassock, the seed pouch and the fig cutting, with the "benediccion" of Rome instead of the torch and the musket, were intoning to dusky neophytes the Litany telling the gentle story of the Virgin, planting the crucified Jesus on rude altars whereat wondering converts might prostrate and adore.

The missions throve, and the vine and the olive of Spain fruited prodigally in the perennial sun of this brown man's land, and the mission bells called obedient folk to the padres who told of God.

Then came these dons, drawn from turbulent Mexico by tales returning padres told of the peace, the untouched acres, the plenty that sprang from little toil, the balm of the sea air and the very Junefulness of existence. The dons came, heroes of many battles, some of them, noble of lineage, weary of revolutions, bringing their families and their family altars, enriched by gifts of land wider than New England counties. They crossed the deserts of northern Mexico and southern Arizona. They braved the heat, the thirst and the Apaches. Some perished on the way, but enough came to possess the region and make their homes in peace. Many Mexicans came as well, the toilers, the peons, the virtual serfs of the dons. The dons were sons of men who had figured since El Cid Campeador in the annals of Spain, who had been princes of the church, councilors of state, who strode with Cortez into Mountezuman halls and wrested treasuries of gold from reluctant Incas. But the tocsin of battle was not for the dons. They sought not "freedom to worship God," but pastures for their sheep and refuge from the brigandage and turmoil of still

savage and unsettled Mexico. Thus these Latin men, scorning the mighty empire that their own industry might have wrought from the Atlantic wilderness, journeyed far roundabout and found at last brief lodgment on the sunny slopes of Southern California. They brought the religion and the speech of Spain, and built a mimic Andalusia and Castile in the serene valleys and along the infrequent and precious water-courses of their new domain. They built great square, squat piles of sun-burned brick with walls as thick as the walls of a fort and as cool as caves in the summer heat. They brought the bull-fight and the moonlight wooing, the guitar and the toreador and all the quick passions of their race and the Latin procrastination that stole away their days. Their daughters were fair, but their sons were indolent. They wrote no books, they built few places of worship, yet Rome was their mentor, and the priests that came after the padres married their children, drank their wines and absolved their transgressions. Their flocks multiplied and they sold shearings and skins to trading ships that plowed a solitary way around the Horn and splashed infrequent anchors in the roadstead off San Pedro. Their silent, sunny, untroubled world was a world all their own, untouched and but vaguely known by the busy, bustling nation far away beyond the mountains, beyond the hot and forbidding desert, and too remote from the scenes of disorder that were alternately setting up and dethroning administrations in Mexico to feel a tyrant's hand or even know the tyrant's name until long after another ruled in his place. Thus years rolled by and the Americans came, in time, one by one peering and poking over

the dun crags of the Sierras that hid the proud and languid dons and their acres and their fat flocks and their rodeos and their bull fights, their vineyards, their olive groves, their loves and their passions and their precious sunshine from a still uncovetous world.

Then one day the dons were told that the Americans had entered the capital of Mexico and that another flag was proclaiming its sovereignty over the dunes and the blue bay at "Yerba Buena," and that the slopes of San Gabriel and all the land from the Pacific ocean to the gulf had passed from the heirs of Spain forever.

The conquest of Mexico made little change in the affairs of the dons. Their lives and their ways went serenely on. Into the mountains of the north Americans were burrowing for gold, and some of those restless, driving men had found their way to the chief town of the south country, to the bunch of gray adobes built along the foot of the hills where thrifty folk had planted vines and figs in the low, moist lands and piously called the favored sunny village—"El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora La Reina de Los Angeles."

When California passed from Mexico the dons ceased to come, and some that were already established not only refused to be reconciled but returned to Mexico. Their placid reign was drawing to a close. In the course of time their sons and their daughters married the sons and daughters of American military and trading men, and their lands were passing to others who were building the west and making a great new state. The old dons were dying off, and the young dons were merging into the new and

conquering race. Even the Spanish title for gentleman—don—which Spanish usage permitted only before Christian names, had come to be as commonly used with surnames.

When the railroad came the Pueblo de Los Angeles was already a town of several thousand with Americans altogether in control, and a new order of things established or fast establishing. A few of the haughty old Castilians still remained, but they realized that the days of their glory were passing; they comprehended that the newcomers would possess in their stead, acquire their lands and erase even their names from memory.

Don Cristobal Sagasto was not the last, but he was among the surviving few of that old and stately regime, not the richest in lands, not the oldest in years, but the foremost in lineage and the proudest of them all, and probably the ablest. Large of frame, broad in mind, with the manners of the grandees who had led armies of Spain and frequented the drawing rooms of the Escorial, of noble prestance and generous nature, he represented both the chivalry and the despair of a chivalrous but passing people. To his proud spirit the rapid disappearance of his family and the thinning out of his companions were a bitter and a melancholy spectacle. His grief for his lost brothers and the prospect that his only remaining son would be unworthy of the name, even if he survived his waywardness and his escapades and dissipation, were only second to his quenchless sorrow for his adored and murdered wife.

Must it thus come to pass? he wondered. Was he then to be the last? Was the great family of Sagastos, who had been companions of kings, who had governed

states, who had wrested victories from Moorish and from continental armies, who had borne the triumphant banners of Spain into palaces of the Incas and whose mailed fists had torn golden idols from Mountezuman altars, whose shoulders had supported a cardinal's red robe, who had conquered with Pizarro and checkmated a Richelieu—were these to vanish thus obscurely from the pages of history and disappear thus meanly in a broken and solitary old man and a weak and prideless youth, five thousand miles from the scenes of their pristine glory, in a remote and unknown land and among an alien people? He thought of the strong men of his name sleeping on Peruvian battle fields, in stately mausoleums in Madrid, and under the shadow of the walls of Toledo; he thought of that heroic man of his blood who had thrown himself in front of his king before the frowning battlements of Granada receiving in his breast the Moorish pike that preserved to Ferdinand his life and earned for the subject a dukedom and the fortunes of a long and illustrious line; and when he thought of this spendthrift, weakling son who bore no likeness to that martial ancestry save his handsome, haughty, but debauch-marked face, the senor's heart was bitter and despairing. In Felicia's peerless beauty and noble character all the worth of her grandsires and their dames found new lodgement, but the name of Sagasto was lost in her marriage and now the hope of the race dwelt in that degenerate brother in whom all the pride, all the fire and force of his kind seemed to have perished. By admonition and by example, by entreaty and by command, by prayer and precept and the recital of the lives and characters of his ancestry, the don had striven to

kindle in his son the manliness and the ambition to live as a Sagasto should and to stand among men as a peer of them all.

A new order of things had come upon them, but the don besought Ruiz to fit into it and become a part of it, and honorably to perpetuate an honorable name. He was too old himself, he said, to change, to undertake to adapt himself; but to the son everything was possible. The age of the soldier had passed; the valorous deeds of the fighting Sagastos might not be re-enacted, but there would be even more honor in a career of peace. If he would go to Mexico, or even to Spain, the senor's influence could place him in line for an active and perhaps a distinguished future. If he preferred to remain at home, there would be opportunities for creating a fortune in this developing country. With the prestige of his name, and such property as remained, he could form a business alliance of great advantage or he could go into politics. The Americans regarded the Spanish and Mexican population as inferior. Let him show that a Sagasto was their peer in force and brains and their superior in breeding. Let him wed worthily and perpetuate the Sagasto name as a noble and a proud one among these new owners of the land. Time after time the don thus appealed to the son who was breaking afresh the heart that the butchery of his wife had already crushed; invoking all the ancestral glory and unfolding the picture of an honorable future to rekindle the dead or flickering embers of the Sagasto pride of race in this so prideless son. Ruiz listened dully, sometimes impatiently, concealing his impatience, however, because of his secret fear that, unless he at least dissembled his

father's anger would supervene over his affectionate, hoping indulgence, and perhaps refuse the demands for money which already had seriously drained the senor's resources.

The don was showing age. He was not old, but his bereavement and the disappointment he had sustained in his son, together with the slight paralysis, were marking for destruction that splendid frame, though not impairing the sturdy spirit. He was sensible of a gradual impairment. Now that Felicia was married, and he hoped happily—but he was not always quite as sure as he wished he might be—he would have awaited calmly as long as it might please God, or as briefly, the end, since the wife of his youth, the love of his life, had gone; but now he wanted to live long enough to fire up the manhood in their son. It was too fearful a thing to believe—that this one son of theirs should thus deport himself unbefitting the name and manner of his forebears. Whence came the strain that thus contorted the almost unbroken chain of forceful, aspiring men? There had been roisterers among them, to be sure, men of turbulent passions and sometimes impious deeds, perhaps, in all that long ancestral line, but there were no meannesses among them, no spiritless weaklings such as this last son of them all. What taint of baseborn blood injected from what remote alliance had lodged in those veins to spend its coarser force through this son who thus demeaned his lineage!

The old don's heart was heavy and his face was somber, yet he clung to the hope that the course of wildness, thriftlessness and pridelessness would run out, and the manhood of his son reassert itself.

Perhaps the don did not take sufficient account of the new conditions that were influencing Ruiz. He did not weigh, on the one hand, the fact that all the Sagastos even down to his own father, had been men of action, fighting men and statesmen.

From the knighting of the first Sagasto before the walls of Granada to the fighting general, his father, the armies of Spain had been almost constantly busy either in foreign conquest or domestic embroilment. Scarcely a single generation of them all that had not, at one time or another, early or late in life, marched with an invading army or wetted a sword in civil war. This last generation of his race had come upon a different field, and the militant life of its men had changed to a bucolic and a strifeless career. The fire of the soldier and the diplomat had burned out in all the others, and there were but ashes in the breast of the last soft male of his race.

The don's heart was heavy as he thought that this indeed might be. His property, too, had dwindled under the drafts he had made upon it for the son, and the division he had given to his daughter. So the don faced the future with melancholy forebodings, and his brother dons were going the way of all flesh.

When Felicia went to a home of her own, the senor and Constancia remained at the rancho, but it was a lonely place for them thereafter. Sagasto was content to be alone, and his niece for a time made no complaint, but the don had from the first perceived that still another change must come. After Felicia, he loved Constancia most. Felicia and her husband came to them many times, and father and daughter frequently rode together on those easy slopes as they had in the

girlhood. As much as might be their companionship went on quite as before. Wifehood ripened and expanded that wholesome, lofty nature, and time and contact with men and women matured her quick and eager mind.

A few months after Felicia and Hemperton were established in their city home, Felicia said to her father that Constancia must come to her. The don winced, but assented.

"She shall live with us, father, and attend the convent. A Sagasto's daughter, she shall have a training that befits her station. She shall come to you, both of us will come to you often, father dear, and you must stay with us whenever you can."

The senor kissed her and declared that it were better that he abide at the rancho. He loved that tranquil way of living more than the town. But Constancia must go.

"Would Mr. Hemperton be willing to have her with them," he asked.

"Indeed he will be delighted. He proposed it himself. She must come at once, now."

Constancia was both pleased and remorseful. She adored them both. At first she clapped her hands, and then she climbed upon her uncle's knee and flung her arms around his neck and declared she could not and would not leave Uncle Tobal alone. Would he come to see her very, *very* often? Might she spend a day at the rancho whenever she wished? Otherwise, she would not go. Cousin Felicia told her she should attend the convent after awhile, and she might return to the rancho whenever there was a vacation and she, Felicia, would be with her.

"And will you promise me, Uncle Tobal, that you

will not be so *very* lonesome?" squeezing his bronzed face between her soft, little hands. Uncle Cristobal promised.

"Truly, really and truly?"

Truly. She must not think about him. She must go to the convent and study very hard to be as clever a woman as Cousin Felicia, and she must obey Cousin Felicia, who loved her as a mother might, and who knew better than he, her uncle, far better what was best for her and whose home was to be her home until she grew to be a woman like Cousin Felicia. And so she went, resigning sovereignty over her loving and mourning subjects of all Fernando, leaving the heart of Uncle Cristobal heavy and desolate. Cousin Felicia gave her a white little room all for her own in the new town house, and with Felicia's mothering, and with Cousin Wayne's kindness—though she was a little bit afraid of this big, black-bearded, busy man—and with many comings and goings with Cousin Felicia to the old rancho home, and with comings and goings of Uncle Tobal to the house in town when she fastened the warm yoke of her clinging fingers upon one of his and bore him a willing captive away to her own little throne and resumed sway upon that useful knee, she was altogether as happy as a sunny and healthful child should be. And when she grew to be a few years older, Cousin Felicia took her to the convent, and although Sister Scholastica welcomed her tenderly and declared she would make her happy and comfortable; and although she quite understood that she was to prepare herself to be a fine lady like Cousin Felicia—who really and truly knew everything in all the wide world and was of

course the most beautiful and the smartest woman anyone had ever seen—still Constancia was miserable when Felicia drove away, and she stood on the convent steps gazing wistfully at the departing carriage, and there was a great lump in her throat notwithstanding the good sister held her by the hand and kissed her and led her away to see other little convent girls.

And thus the years were passing, and Don Sagasto dwelt alone in his silent country home, sowed and harvested his wheat and pressed his grapes and olives, sat meditating for many hours alone on the veranda, looking away across the valley to the hills beyond where lived the ones he loved so well, shutting himself more and more into companionship with his memories, and giving stately and simple welcome to the old friends and to the new.

CHAPTER XI

Priest and Man

TO shrewd and industrious men opportunities came swiftly in the years that followed the opening of the railroad, and Hemperton was both shrewd and industrious. He prospered steadily even if not so rapidly as his ambitions craved. As proprietor of half the Sagasto estate, his importance had sensibly increased. He erected a mansion where society found a congenial welcome; and valued and enduring friendships, not mere sterile conventions, were begotten of Felicia's gracious amiability and her strong common sense. Not alone among her own people was she affectionately regarded, but equally so by Americans. In mentality as in the personal equation there were none to divide her primacy. As she had been virtual priestess-assistant to Father Leon in the San Fernando parish, so she entered zestfully and sympathetically and quite as a matter-of-course into early co-adjutorship in the priest's new and steadily widening field. As her well-poised mind expanded and her character rounded out she better understood and more feelingly appreciated the high-mindedness and manly worth and intellect of her friend. She rejoiced that at last his militant nature enjoyed unbitted freedom in a field well suited to his mettle.

Between the bishop and Felicia a community of religious and intellectual interest and sympathy developed, and to her the bishop time and again confided his pride in and admiration for the able priest, and his expectation that Father Leon's would be a great career.

"We must make him a bishop," Felicia declared, and the bishop said: "Have patience, my daughter, be not too ambitious for him. A bishop he will be, beyond a doubt. I have many times advised the Holy Father of our friend's ability and zealousness. Father Leon's time will come, but we need him just where he is, for the present. He has done more to invigorate and spread the faith and the power of the church than any dozen priests since the days of Junipera Serra and Fermin Lasuen," the old man declared, without the slightest symptom of jealousy of his virile and eloquent assistant.

Although Felicia was a devout and even uncompromising Romanist she was in no sense a bigot. She never obtruded her faith, nor did she exclude the women of evangelical churches from the sphere of her sympathetic and affectionate association. All were welcome at her home, and no non-Catholic table but was honored and delighted to include her as a guest and familiar friend. Her charity was not parochial. She shared Father Leon's ambitions for the establishment of a great Catholic community, and among her unspoken hopes was a desire to assist in some generous and efficient way in the achievement of a really splendid cathedral that would be both a testament to Father Leon's power and an enduring evidence of the progress of their faith. Her husband's irreligion was her first unhappiness, and

might constitute the most serious obstacle in the way of her far-reaching plans.

Wayne sometimes spoke slightly, almost contemptuously, of Catholic ceremonials and what he called "Romish absurdities," and his attendance with his wife at Catholic service, for some time quite regular, became less frequent.

Both the bishop and Father Leon were privileged frequenters of the Hemperton household, and by the avenue of the popularity of Felicia and the freedom and congeniality with which people of diverse faiths and of no faiths at all met in the Hemperton drawing-room, both bishop and priest ramified their acquaintance into numerous families whose doors might otherwise have remained closed to them. The Hemperton home was a common meeting ground for the Catholic and non-Catholic society of the region, a sort of social and intellectual clearing-house where the best minds of the city associated in agreeable intercourse; pastors and leading members of non-Catholic congregations were drawn to the Hemperton table, and were attracted again and again by the liberality and intelligence of the hostess, and found in the bishop and his assistant companionship acceptable beyond expectation. The bishop, by nature somewhat disinclined to commingling beyond his circle, thawed and broadened under the tact and influence of this liberal and adroit hostess, and good Doctor Parks, not the broadest of evangelical pastors himself, confessed that he would not have believed that a Catholic bishop could be so fair-minded and so entertaining. And as for Father Leon, he said, he was a rarely engaging personality, and if the Roman policy were shaped

and dominated by men of his lofty conceptions of Christianity and citizenship the Roman church would be a more formidable contestant in the theological world.

Except for Hemperton's disregard for Felicia's beliefs, amounting to positive disrespect sometimes, there was no unconjugal disagreement between them. Experience of several years had seemed to justify her decision. Thus far, at least, there had not only arisen no reason to regret her marriage, but she had been unqualifiedly contented and happy. Her father's keen eye and instinct had been satisfied, on the whole. There were three bare flecks of fog on the domestic horizon, however, that might, the don sometimes vaguely apprehended, develop into the proportions of clouds and trouble the domestic sun; but it was more probable that they would disappear altogether in the course of time. The don observed that Hemperton was occasionally irritable with Felicia. But the don could not persuade himself that it was serious, or that it really portended ill. It was an irritability that could not, after all, be said to be in excess of the natural inequalities of the best of the high-strung American business temperaments. On the whole Hemperton was an indulgent and considerate husband and the senor admired his energetic, business-like, successful son-in-law, and detected no signs of disquiet in his dear daughter. That which most troubled him was Hemperton's alienation from Felicia's church. More than once the senor had been made uncomfortable by an unprovoked thrust of Hemperton's about "that damn flummery that Felicia goes through," but the old man clung to the hope that his son-in-

law's intimate association with and apparent admiration for Father Leon would be the means of eventually reconciling the American to the church, and with that would disappear the only serious menace to their peace.

"Do you think Mr. Hemperton will ever yield to your influence, father?" the don anxiously inquired, more than once. "Are you able to move him at all?"

"At heart Mr. Hemperton is a stony nature, I fear, senor, and sometimes I am shocked by the exposure of what seems to be not only an irreligious side that has never been awakened, but what in a man of less uprightness of conduct and less reputation for integrity I should describe as a moral paralysis, almost an insensibility to finer ethical distinctions, strangely contrasting with his general standards of right and wrong. I have studied the man intently. I have approached him with all the adroitness I could command to reach some unguarded recesses in his nature through which I might touch his heart and understanding, and arouse his interest in matters of faith. I have thus far failed. There is a secret door to his soul that he keeps too securely closed even from me."

The relation between Hemperton and Father Leon had grown more brotherly as the years went on, the priest's intellectuality and good fellowship winning Hemperton's sincere admiration and real liking. Hemperton's considerable library was their common retreat and the priest's enduring delight. There they chatted and exchanged confidences, and discussed and argued the multifarious themes that might interest men of their mind except religion; they touched but lightly upon that. The difference

between them was too wide. With any other Hemperton might have been disputatious and caustic but with the priest, royal good fellow, he forebore. Hemperton was drifting further and further away from all beliefs of any and every description. Never did he cease to deplore even to the priest himself the self-imposed sentence of excommunication from a great secular career. He declined to argue on doctrinal themes at all. Whatever else he might have been he could not, he said, be a Romanist; but once in a while, even before the priest himself, he dropped a sneer about the credulity of the average communicant and the absurdity of transubstantiation.

Once in the course of the exceedingly rare moments when he permitted himself an indulgence in thrusts at expense of the faith of the priest, he cited the taking of bread and the drinking of wine as holy flesh and blood as the supreme impossibility for him to accept, an instance of complete irreconcilability with evidence of the senses.

"It looks like bread and wine does it not, father?" he asked.

"Yes," admitted the priest.

"And it tastes like bread and wine?"

"Yes."

"And it feels and smells like bread and wine?"

"Yes."

"Well, father, I am compelled by the evidence of my senses to believe that it is bread and wine in fact."

"The trouble with you, my friend, is that you believe in your *senses*, while I believe in God."

Whereupon Hemperton broke into a hearty laugh, confessed the priest had the better of the argument

and never attempted that line of attack again. He would not say the scornful biting things that would have been his readiest weapons. He knew the priest could silence him in sheer force of debate, and too much did he respect the man and enjoy the good fellowship to fire the disdainful, sarcastic and coarser missiles that stocked the arsenal of his unbelieving mind.

But he dared say to Father Leon what no other would have presumed, what no other could have said without arousing resentment, respecting the priest's own career.

"I am forever wondering why you did not fit yourself for surgery, or the law," he had interrogated time and again. "You made a fearful sacrifice! Talk about duty, and your opportunity to save souls and to prop weak human nature! Why, my dear friend, reflect upon the duty of a mind such as yours to exploit a field of usefulness and benefaction in a more practical direction! Just think what a world of good you might have found to do as a surgeon in a great city! What a career you might have had as a lawyer, or in business. What a mistake that such a brain as yours should be prostituted into a sewer—that's what you make of it—a sewer—for old women's neighborhood gossip—when it might be alleviating the sufferings of a whole race by scientific experimentation, or lift you to international fame as a statesman."

While Hemperton was thus expostulating, the priest's elbow rested on the table, his great dome of a head on his open palm.

"You ask me, my friend, why I am a priest of Rome?" he said, suddenly lifting his eyes and gazing

through rather than at his companion. "You wonder why I, surcharged with energy and possessed of some ability you are good enough to say, have consecrated my life to the ministrations of my church? I will tell you why! In youth my ambitions were much of those of other young and healthy normal men. It had been planned for me, and I had assented and looked forward to its execution, to enter a secular field. I was to have gone to Madrid. My family were rich and lineaged Spanish nobles. I could have enjoyed easy access to a public career. I might have entered the cabinet of my king. I might have risen to important command in the Spanish army. I had but to elect my own station. I was consumed with a restless and ambitious energy, and there was a powerful family influence to my advantage. But there were six brothers of us, two older, three younger than myself. Three entered the army, two remained at home and two were killed in battle in the Philippines, one was shipwrecked and lost on his way back to Spain, one was shot in a duel, one perished by accident in the Pyrenees—and all within one single year! The shock and the grief killed my mother in a few months more, and my father succumbed to old age and a broken heart less than a year after that."

Father Leon had risen, and was slowly pacing back and forth. "The imminence of death was impressed upon me with awful impact, and the utter vanity and unprofit of all human ambitions! Three of my brothers were wild and irreverent, and so was I in those days. The manner of their death was as violent and as shocking as the irreverence of their lives. I became possessed of the belief that the

highest purpose in life was not only to live uprightly one's self, but to direct the unthinking, to convert the irreverent. The saving of men, the preparing of them for a hereafter, the strengthening of tottering and tempted human nature appealed to me in the shock of my grief and in the midst of my reflection as the loftiest form of human endeavor. I determined to become a priest and to dedicate my life to the alleviation of distress and to the endeavor to make men better. In order to successfully inspire others to control themselves I believed that it would be necessary that I master my own temptestuous character. Why, my friend, you do not know what a stormy and appetent nature that was—the youth that made that resolve. A priest of Rome must first of all conquer himself. It was a fearful and almost insuperable struggle, because the blood in my veins was the blood of a long line of strong, fighting, turbulent, passionate and ambitious men.

“Look at me!” exclaimed the priest, and he straightened his powerful figure, “look at me, Wayne Hemperton! You see the priest, but you have never known the man with all the fire and temper and appetites and ambitions of the race from which I came. Your friendly jibes and your regrets and your wonderment that I chose to exclude myself from the world of affairs might have moved me, once; they even touched me in the days back there at Fernando, before the inward struggle quite came to an end. Yes, my friend, I could have accomplished things in your busy world. I know my own powers, Hemperton, and I know my own weakness too, and by the help of God I am master, complete master of myself and my soul! I will not be such a boy

crite as to tell you that the struggle was not intense or that the outcome was never in doubt; but I can say to you that it ended long ago, and that I would not exchange my present beatitude of mind and my ambitions to achieve that which I see to be achieved for all the pride of Spain's empire, for all the power of a Spanish sovereign! I am master, my friend, and wrenched no more by the tempests of my youth. But let me tell you," and the priest's countenance, always lofty and expressive, suffused now with the emotion of his recollections, became tense and his voice lowered and thrilled with earnestness: "On my study table, there, within reach of my hand and always before my eyes, stands a human skull confronting me. Why do I keep it there? To admonish me, my friend, a daily reminder of my duty, to keep ever-present before my understanding the visible, unmistakable evidence of the inconsequential atom that I am and to what I have dedicated my life and what intellect God has been pleased to give me, and to what I must inevitably return—a reminder of the futility of ambition and appetite, a mute but convincingly eloquent invocation to live unselfishly. Ah, my friend! I am indeed intensely human, but thank God I have become absolute master!"

Hemperton was too abashed to speak. The contrast between this heroic and self-denying man and his own self-indulging nature was chastisement too sudden and too sharp to release from his fountains of feeling a relieving word while the spell was on them both. He had, without meaning to do so, sprung the shutter on the very inside soul of Father Leon, and the swift vision of it reflected back a

revealing light into his own, and for one brief instant stunned him with the deformity he saw therein. Father Leon made a few silent turns to and fro in the library, then stood before Hemperton. "I would that I might persuade you, my dear friend!"

Hemperton was looking beyond the priest, on through a window. After a pause he lifted his eyes to his companion, and without a word raised his hand with palm outward—unspoken request to say no more. Then he arose and changed the subject, and very shortly the priest withdrew. To save him Hemperton could not define why, but somehow that swift insight which Father Leon had given to him of the tempestuous nature buckled and corded down under that oaken self-control, suddenly aggravated his impatience with his wife's devotion to her creed. For a considerable period, beginning directly after their marriage, he had frequently accompanied Felicia to services, sometimes to hear the bishop, sometimes Father Leon; but latterly he had pled one excuse or another, and his wife had adjusted herself to his absence.

"What if the dam that the priest had erected across his nature to impound the currents that pour down from the fountain of his heart should burst, some day," thought Hemperton. "What if the human in the man should accumulate so powerful a head of nature-steam, and the spiritual—the priestly self-repression—should be overwhelmed by some sudden over-mastering temptation—what then? What a fearful devastation of human soul might then be the consequence! What a gigantic, appalling mistake it had been after all, this abnegation of Father Leon! How much more wise if the natural

forces of the man had been directed down their wonted channels to play their natural parts in the affairs of men and women, instead of that self-separation, that impounding of nature-forces, like so much reservoired mountain storm-water!"

As the priest was departing, Hemperton not leaving the library so familiar and privileged were Father Leon's relations with them, Hemperton heard his wife's voice in the hall talking with him. Hemperton was conscious of being annoyed by their easy comraderie, and conscious also of being still more annoyed that the incident had annoyed him at all. He was distinctly relieved that Senor Sagasto came in presently, having been with Felicia below.

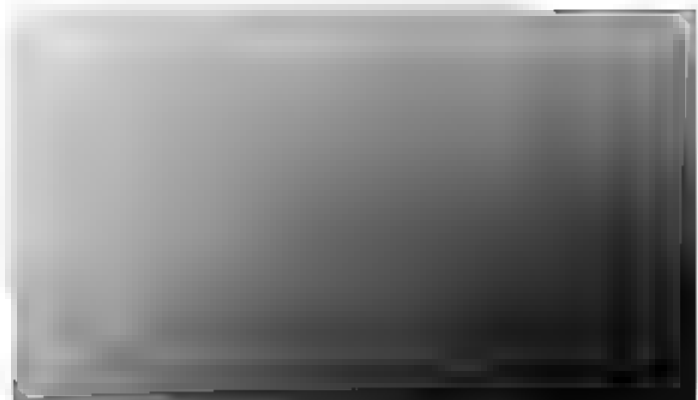
"Ruiz is in more trouble, Hemperton;" the don rarely called his son-in-law by his first name. "I am distressed about the boy. I secured for him a place in the commission firm of Ware & Marks, but he has repeated his former faults, inattention and dissipation, and now Mr. Ware notifies me that Ruiz has misappropriated a considerable sum of money. I shall pay it, but I am already overburdened with the consequences of his conduct. I shall have to mortgage a part of the rancho. Can you take the mortgage and advance me the cash?"

Yes, Hemperton said he could.

Would Hemperton be kind enough to give his brother-in-law another admonitory overhauling?

Yes, he would. He had expostulated with him many a time already and he would rather enjoy doing it again, unsparingly too, he determined. He knew that precious little result it would produce. But he would do it. This was the second parcel of land that Sagasto had mortgaged to

Hemperton to pay debts of his graceless son. Hemperton was quite willing to take the mortgage. Shrunken, indeed, the remaining portion of the property that Ruiz might ever receive.



CHAPTER XII

The Passion of Senor Ramon

THE union of Felicia and Hemperton had not reconciled Senor Modeno to his defeat and disappointment. His rage was almost insuppressible. He brooded in his dark and silent way, harboring resentment not only against the triumphant lover but against Felicia as well. He had been too timid to repeat his murderous assault upon Hemperton, and he had studiously kept out of his way, but he and young Sagasto had conspired together, time and again, to inflict some sort of damage, to concoct vengeance of one kind or another upon the driving, shouldering, sardonic man whom both so bitterly hated. The secret of the animosity of Ruiz was not difficult to trace—the passing of half of the patrimony that should have been his to the detested American. He did not reflect that in any event a half would have gone to Felicia or to whomsoever she might have wed. Ruiz did not reason about that. The American was in possession, the feared, the hated, the dominating American, and that constituted grievance enough to provoke all his malice and his elemental passion for revenge.

Darkly they schemed and plotted, but to no purpose. Their failure to assassinate him had made

them cowardly. They rightly surmised that Hemperton would forever after be on guard and fully prepared for any sort of an encounter by day or by night. For Felicia's sake Hemperton had never attempted to tantalize young Sagasto by betraying that the identity of those midnight assailants was known to him, and Modeno had so effectually avoided him that he had few opportunities, even in the course of several years, to make the drives at the Spaniard that he had planned. He chuckled to himself whenever he thought how he could and would make Modeno writhe when the time came. And the time would come.

Meanwhile the increasing good fortune of Hemperton, the result not of luck nor accident, but the product of his shrewdness and industry inflamed the jealousy and fanned the sullen, secret anger of his unforgiving but uncourageous foes. Modeno had managed to fabricate excuse for not attending Felicia's wedding, but he had seen Felicia frequently afterward. His family being intimately friendly with her father, therefore to have habitually absented himself from social gatherings where she was present, at her home and elsewhere, might attract gossiping attention, particularly as it had been assumed that he was a candidate for her hand. In the very nature of things he had been obliged to come into a degree of relation with Hemperton, but he adroitly managed to avoid actual personal contact except on rare occasions. In his peculiar Spanish way he was proud-spirited and he could not have endured the finger of ridicule pointing him out as a disgruntled, pouting, disappointed lover; therefore he mastered himself enough to attend an occasional gathering at

the Hemperton home, but he studied to avoid Hemperton himself. He envied, beyond all power to express it, he envied her American husband, and Hemperton's growing ascendancy was bitter aggravation of his own defeat.

Modeno detested not only this particular American, but he hated the whole race and brood and blood of Americans everywhere. The Modeno family was counted well-to-do, but their estate was neither so extensive nor had it been so profitable as that of Sagasto's. Americans were slowly crowding all Spaniards out of the forefront of things in Southern California and young Modeno resented the invasion. The old things were passing; new men and new conditions were taking their place. Houses of the adobe age were being supplanted by American structures of wood and brick. The glory of the adobe church of Our Lady of the Angels, for many years the home of fashionable worship where the great Spanish families had gathered of a Sunday and on Saints' days, where their children were christened and confirmed, where their marriages were celebrated, and about whose portals that are never closed Mexican and Indian and half-breed loitered, rebezo-headed and serape-wrapped, the glory of this long-famous church had departed, the new cathedral and the sanctuaries of Americans housing larger and far wealthier congregations. The fair sunland was slipping away from the Spaniard, the old families who had comprised for half a century the quality of Southern California, whose acres had spread like principalities across those silent valleys for generations, were sensible of steadily diminishing importance. American men were acquiring control of

business, American girls were usurping in society the reign of the senorita. There were a few of those bewitching daughters of the old regime, the pure Spanish, the creamy-cheeked, full-bosomed Castilian beauties, last lovely flowers of the old society, but they were few indeed. There were numerous Mexican belles and beaux, but they were another race, though speaking the same language. The Castilian girls were peachy and lustrous-eyed, with faces of high-bred and oval mold, but the Mexican types were dark-complexioned, heavier featured and less handsome.

The American was everywhere possessing the land. He was erecting more costly homes and stores in town, converting ancient sheep pastures into olive and orange groves, constructing reservoirs, building railroads, expelling cattle and substituting the plow, elbowing the Spaniard and the Mexican out and bringing more Americans in. Mission bells of San Gabriel and San Fernando and picturesque San Juan Capistrano, that had clanged a hundred years before their angelus call to the faithful brown proteges of Serra and Lasuen, and their successors, were silent now, and the wards of the padres dispersed or dead, the mission edifices crumbling and cobwebby, the mission estates in the hands of an alien and unsympathetic race.

When the first locomotive poked its snorting, steely nostril through the San Fernando tunnel, Southern California's sleep of ages was ended forever, and the Saxon had thereby completed the conquest that the Spaniard began but which he had surrendered to more achieving minds.

So Modeno and his people beheld the passing of

this old regime and the coming of the new, and in a dreamy, silent fashion they scoffed and scorned but felt defeat, and in the course of time became as aliens almost among the streets and scenes made sadly unfamiliar by plow and hammer, spade and trowel of the strenuous people who wrested this empire of sunshine from their fathers and from them.

So Senor Modeno had gone on hating Hemperton and had gone on loving in his wild, passionate Castilian unrestraint the Felicia he adored before the American came. He avoided Hemperton, but he craftily sought his wife. Sinister thoughts had found lodgment in his mind, and dark and illaudable were the designs he harbored and hoped might be carried out. He brooded over the dream that Felicia might become discontented, after a period, with her American husband, and if there should appear the faintest indication he would nurture it and encourage it and play upon it, and in the course of time perhaps he might persuade Felicia to separate from Hemperton and take refuge with him in Mexico. Insidiously he had sounded his way, careful yet to make no false move in his unrelenting purpose. More than once he had attempted to take that soft Castilian hand and stealthily pour the fires of his passionate heart into ears that must not hear and look love into the luminous eyes that must not see. Shocked, amazed, incredulous, pure souled Felicia turned blazing eyes upon the man who dared this indignity, and then forgot and forgave for friendship's sake and because her own heart was pure and could think no evil.

But the fires smoldered on in the heart of Modeno and the lofty nature that flashed down into him

through those unfearing eyes, instead of ennobling his own calculating soul, filled him fuller than ever with a fever of desire.

There was a party at the Hemperton mansion. The wide grounds were illuminated, and the August night was starry, still and soft. Felicia's resplendent loveliness was dazzling, her exquisite throat and shoulders gleaming white, their whiteness accentuated by the lustrous blackness of her hair. Modeno was gracious, easy and natural tonight, neither eye nor tone nor manner betraying the volcanic tumult in his breast. Felicia, disarmed by months of his natural friendly self, and preferring to think of him as the courteous companion of earlier years, without hesitation strolled in easy and trustful comradeship. Modeno led to a seat under a huge umbrella tree, from which depended a fantastic colored light. He told her of a fishing party programed to sail in a yacht from San Pedro a week hence, which she would be expected to join. Felicia regretted that engagements would prevent. He urged for old time's sake, and Felicia was considering if she might arrange to accept.

Overwhelmed by her beauty, or by his own wild, disappointed ardor, he seized her hand and into her astonished ears poured in quick words the story of his undying and unholy love. Furious and disappointed Felicia rose to her feet, and would have left him talking there, but with both hands he detained her, beseeching her to revive in her heart the love he believed she had had for him before the American came. All the heat and passion of his race surged through his heart, all the love, baffled, humiliated but never regulated, torrential but never controlled,

inflamed by years of brooding and regret, fired every atom of his self-indulgent person and flared like a flambeau through his eyes. Instead of subduing his love for Felicia when she wed, instead of manly self-mastery, he had dreamed and dallied as a boy playing and nursing with this hopeless and unholy passion, tormenting himself, surcharging the magazine of his emotions with a deadly combustible that was now taking fire.

Shocked by her misplaced confidence, angry with herself for being deluded and brought where this painful scene could be enacted, Felicia listened with ears that heard not, dreading to draw publicity and comment by outcry, and fearful too that some guest might even then be overhearing.

"Felicia! Felicia!" Modeno implored, "come, go away with me to Mexico, to Spain, anywhere that we may escape from these despicable Americans! I cannot remain here and see you going about as the wife of this detested Hemperton, and I cannot go alone leaving you to him. My love for you is torturing me beyond endurance! You are one of us, Felicia, you are not of his! You cannot, I know you cannot be happy with him. This American could never in an eternity love you as I do! If you fancy that you are contented now, you know that you cannot be contented hereafter with the American. Felicia—I love you! Come, Felicia! Come with me!"

Thus the first transport of his madness spent its force. Felicia said, sadly, gently, forbearingly, as if sorrowing for the irreparable loss of a dear friend: "Let us sit here a minute longer, dear old comrade, while I speak with you for the last time." He

started to protest. "Yes, the last time, Ramon, companion of my girlhood. I have been angry with you before, but now I am only sad and disappointed. For this can never happen again. I have believed that with all your fierce nature, Ramon, you were still back of it all a man, a man of the stern, true mettle of your dear old father. I have trusted you, Ramon, and forborne with you; but you must never presume to enter my house again. Give to your people what excuse you like, but you must come no more! I had hoped that you would command yourself that we might be good friends as we were so long; but I see it cannot be, Ramon, and I am very, very sorry! You must plead some excuse hereafter for remaining away; because I tell you, Ramon, if you set foot in my house again, within three years at least, I will tell my husband all that you have said, and he will not deal indifferently with you. People say that I am gentle. That may be true, Ramon, but I am nevertheless a Castilian and a Sagasto, and I can be as resolute as a Sagasto general even if I am a woman."

She turned her fearless, commanding eyes full upon him, and Modeno knew this was her final word.

"Then I will kiss you farewell, my Felicia, my glorious angelic love—superbest of women that you are! I will kiss you once, Felicia, as I desire!"

He flung his arms around her and pressed kisses upon her throat and her shoulders and her cheeks again and again, ignoring her struggles and her chaste anger. Infuriate now, all the haughty pride and temper of her fathers boiled in that white, swelling bosom; insulted womanhood, outraged friendship and wifehood's dignity demeaned swept

and suffused her in one enveloping wave that endowed her with abnormal strength. Grasping Modeno by the throat with firm hands she pushed him by sheer force from her, backward and down upon his back, choking him, choking him till his passion-reddened face went purple. Then she heard a step and looked—"Father Leon—you!"

The priest gave her his hand to rise. Flushed, panting, livid, her eyes blazing with the wrath of an archangel, Felicia lifted her head to the priest, and pointing one fair, steady finger straight at the cowering Modeno, exclaimed quietly but with the manner of an Isabella, "Father Leon, conduct this person from my grounds!"

The priest's countenance was without a trace of color, and fixed as hewn granite. "Yes, my daughter, I know—I understand," and slightly inclined his head. "Let us go together, the three of us, it will be best. I will attend to the rest." Felicia bowed. And thus, Father Leon walking between them, they strolled leisurely and unconcernedly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, back to the guests, Felicia detaching herself to join the first group they met.

Father Leon proceeded slowly, nodding as he went, side by side with Modeno; saw him take his hat, continued with him to the gate, and bowed ever so slightly without a word as Modeno passed out into the street. The priest stood with eyes fixed straight into the night, with moving but inarticulate lips, then raised his face to the stars, made upon his bosom the sign of the cross, and with impenetrable mastery of countenance turned his way back to the guests.

CHAPTER XIII

A Sadducee

ALTHOUGH Hemperton's impatience with his wife's devotion to her faith was perceptibly increasing, the relations between himself and Father Leon were no less cordial. Hemperton, however, was sensible that his interest in the priest had undergone some degree of change. He did not undertake to analyze the whys and wherefores, nor was there observable any difference whatever in his attitude toward his friend. Neither the priest nor Felicia detected or suspected the slightest cooling of Hemperton's appreciation. Indeed, Hemperton himself was scarcely sensible of diminishment of affectionate interest and admiration. But dating from that afternoon when the priest had exposed to him the undercurrents of his subjugated nature, Hemperton had from time to time been vaguely conscious of a slowly altering state of mind toward him. It was wholly indefinable and utterly vague and involuntary, a kind of resentment, more than anything else, of the priest's unintentional disparagement of his, Hemperton's, inferiority of nature by the sharp contrast of Father Leon's revelation of his own easy adequacy of strength. Hemperton's vaguely realized resentment was in itself a tribute of his own inferiority to

the priest's sublimated character. Involuntarily he associated his wife's exaltation of soul on the same plane with the priest. Hemperton's character and reputation in the community were the very highest. He had never permitted the shadow of a reproach to attach to his name. Every transaction was upright even if his business methods were exacting. Yet there, in most intimate propinquity with him, were two natures which this man of probity instinctively recognized to be so far removed above his own as to set him apart in a solitude almost overpowering had he permitted himself to contemplate the contrast. He looked upon the enthusiasms of Father Leon and the co-operation of Felicia as the manifestations of racial forces and poetic idealisms for which he entertained a smoldering impatience. Yet he was altogether proud of his wife's leadership and of the public recognition of her superiority and the public admiration of her personality.

He knew that Father Leon had dreamed extravagant dreams of a Catholic ascendancy and he knew that these dreams were to encounter disappointment. The priest had indeed already run athwart some stony disillusionings. He had flung himself into the new and broader and ever-broadening field with transcendent ardor to hasten a far-reaching Catholic sociality, thoroughly American in its civicism, but united in loving obedience to the church of his fathers. It was the priest's dearest idealism, but it was destined, Hemperton well knew, never to be. The priest's reception among both the old and the new families, the Spanish-speaking and the American, the Catholic and the non-Catholic, had been most cordial and flattering. His enthusiasms were

self-contained and unbounded, his proselyting unobtrusive, but flaming with zeal and confidence. At first he mistook the extreme personal interest in himself for manifestations of a spiritual awakening, but his mind was too acute not to penetrate the truth. The society into which he was introduced through the Hempertons applauded, invited and appreciated the brilliant, brainy man, and his congregations quickly overflowed the auditorium. People wondered at his powers and they thronged to hear his oratory, but the increase in the membership of his communicants, while far in excess of any of his predecessors, sorely disappointed him. He was easily the foremost pulpit mind in the town and state, and he was accorded the consideration that his intellect commanded, but the brilliant, courtly man, the impassioned orator was one thing, his priesthood quite another. The Americans and the newcomers came, and therefore offered a sterile and unpromising field for the priest's broad and efflagrant, Catholic zeal. His disillusioning after seven or eight years, while sharp and poignant, was by no means complete. His generous mind, his tolerant attitude toward other faiths, his urbanity, his gentleness, his exhortations to correct and lofty citizenship brought him into quick and constant prominence and social favor. His practical heart-to-heart and man-to-man human sympathy and helpfulness and ministrations utterly disregarded the confines of his church and reached out among men and women to the needy and the groping everywhere, Catholic and non-Christian alike. Souls and hearts and human lives were more than creeds to him. His own stormy youth and tempted manhood gave him

profound insight into the natures and temptations of all mankind, and kept his human sympathies ever sensitive to all manner of human necessities of soul and heart and flesh. Felicia was here, as at Fernando, his especial confidante, coadjutor and inspiration. He was forever going about hunting for distress that he might alleviate, forever drawing young men into the scope of his fatherly and brotherly influence, forever bestowing unsolicited benefaction, forever ministering in his private, personal way to uneasy and distracted minds, forever fortifying by his practical man-to-man appeals and counsels torn and tempted and uncertain souls. In all that he did Felicia was his most prompt and energetic assistant, nor did she wait for his suggestion, but herself was assiduously initiative in the same practical, Christian, human work.

As years wore on and Hemperton's character hardened he admired the intellectual and good-fellowship side of Father Leon no less, but he began to be sensible of something akin to irritation under the priest's privileged presence about the house. Hemperton's attendance at his wife's church had ceased; she had for a long time urged him, and sadly missed him and deplored his state of mind. One Sunday she kissed him and asked if he would not go with her again, just today. Hemperton peevishly declined. "I will have nothing more to do with that miserable flubdubry and idolatry," he said. "I don't see how a sensible woman like you can subscribe to it. No, I will not go. Never ask me again."

She looked at him, amazed and hurt.

"Why, Wayne, dear husband, what is coming over

you? I do not mean to annoy you, dear, but it is such a pleasure to have you go with me. You never spoke so harshly before. Surely I do not mean to parade my beliefs before you; but I think it is only my individual right, Wayne, to believe as I please and to engage in the work of my church. You must be fretted about something, else you would not begrudge me this, and at least you would not speak so harshly. There, now," she continued, kissing him, "I will not go. You are not quite well, I am sure. I will stay with you today."

"No, Felicia, go to church. I simply cannot take any interest in that sort of thing, but I am sorry I hurt your feelings. Go on, dear, I am not ill at all. I am sorry I spoke as I did."

He kissed her, and Felicia went away, still hurt and vaguely uneasy.

Felicia's prompt and ready way of doing things pleased her husband as much as her church devotion annoyed him. One day a little American boy, stranger to Felicia, was knocked down and run over by a runaway team in a down-town street. The lad's leg was broken. He was a mere, soil-stained, little ragamuffin. The carriage of Mrs. Hemperton happened to be passing as the lad was picked up and borne to the sidewalk. Felicia descended, got his name and the address of his obscure home, directed that he be placed in her carriage, engaged a physician whom she insisted upon accompanying her, and took the boy straight to his mother.

That sort of thing delighted her husband. It pleased his vanity that she play the Lady Bountiful and the Lady Merciful as much as she choose.

On another occasion a man repairing the roof of

the Hemperton house slipped, fell and cut a great gash in the side of his head, but was not killed. Felicia not only had him occupy a bed in her house until he could be moved to his own, but she provided for his dependent family until he recovered. Acts such as this gratified her husband and spread the story of Hemperton's benevolence.

She scorned the spurious superiority that shied away from scarlet womanhood. She not only bade Father Leon command her intercession and her purse for such as these, at his pleasure, but more than once she defied comment and convention by sheltering in the sanctuary of her own house and assigning to a seat at her table a repentant sister discovered by her own initiative, until Felicia restored her to her people or established her in honest employment. Felicia's interest never stopped at that. She followed after every protege with unforgetting attention and helpfulness, and wholesome sunny, sustaining sympathy.

Hemperton observed unmoved the slow decline of the fortunes of Senor Sagasto. There had been some scant yields of wheat because of arid winters, and the senor's son had burdened him more and more. If the don chose to squander sums upon that worthless Ruiz he might do it, for all Hemperton cared, but no one would sympathize with the father, Hemperton least of all, if the don became embarrassed or finally wrecked himself. The estate was gradually passing under mortgage, chiefly to Hemperton, who contemplated the prospect with those steady and leveled eyes of his.

At the solicitation of the senor, Father Leon had repeatedly expostulated with Ruiz, time after time

admonished and exhorted, implored and counseled with all his persuasive and appealing power. Ruiz promised his father, his sister and the priest, but promises weighed lightly upon his unfilial heart. He had become little better than an indolent voluptuary, an idler and a spendthrift. He made no secret of his dislike of his sister's husband, and he treated with contempt Hemperton's earlier appeals to his self-respect.

"Who the devil are you?" he scornfully replied. "You have no right to talk to me! You have no business to be in our family! You are only a damned interloper! You simply wanted my father's land, and you have got it, curse you! Don't you lecture me. I will take none of it from you nor any other damned American!"

The opportunity was too tempting to be disregarded. "As you please, my dear young senor, as you please," he rejoined in that easy, drawling, teasing tone that always portended a thrust. "There is no law, I believe, forbidding you to be an ingrate son or even a mild imitation of a blackguard, if you insist; but permit me to remind you that the midnight ambushade as a method of wreaking private vengeance will scarcely become popular in this country and is quite unbecoming in the sons of brave old gentlemen."

That was the first allusion Hemperton had ever made before anyone to the assault by Ruiz and Modeno upon himself years before.

"Do you mean to insinuate—," Ruiz blusteringly broke out, shaking his head, but Hemperton detected the panic behind the bravado, and cut into the unfinished reply. "I mean to insinuate nothing,

my dear young Senor Sagasto. I merely admonish, once and forever, that's all," and leveled his cold and steady eye straight as a rifle barrel at the affrighted man. Ruiz spat out a sneer and turned away.

About this time a member of his former parish at San Fernando whom Father Leon well remembered as Senora Orquez, whose husband had been killed by the explosion in the tunnel, called at the parish house. The priest remembered her, moreover, as the mother of that Ysabel who once had flaunted her wild coquetries before him. Would Father Leon accompany her at once, or do her the honor to call at her dwelling place? A trouble had come upon them that only he might relieve.

"What is it, senora?"

"Do not ask now, father, but come to us quickly and see for yourself. You would not believe if you did not see. Will you not come?"

"I will," said the priest. She conducted him to a poor adobe in the district that had been covered by the flood on that never-to-be-forgotten night. She signaled to him to pass into a room that connected with the one they entered from the street. There, from a narrow bed, the black eyes of Ysabel looked full and unabashed upon him, but the boldness he had noted in them years before was there no longer, only a look of appeal, a plea for mercy and assistance, a wondering inquiry if indeed he would—for her.

"Ysabel, have you been ill long?" asked Father Leon, in that mellow, moving, sympathetic voice that stirred women so. He put his big warm hand upon her forehead.

Ysabel for answer threw back a corner of the cover and the priest saw a coppery morsel of a face. The countenance of him grew grave, then stern, then tender.

Ysabel's mother knelt before Father Leon and took his hand in both hers. "Father Leon! Father Leon! Do not condemn her! Do not make it harder for her. Pity her, Father Leon, pity her and me, because Ysabel is not the one to blame. He it is, father, who should be punished because he had promised to make her his wife. Do not condemn her, Father Leon, because that may make her a bad woman, and Ysabel is not a bad woman. You alone can save her and help her, good Father Leon, if you only will!"

Ysabel had never taken her eyes from the big, gentle priest. There was no apprehension in her eyes, only hopeful expectancy.

"Senora, this is no time for a priest to utter condemnation. It is a time to help. My poor daughter! Have no fear of me, Ysabel, I will do what I can for you and the child."

The eyes of Ysabel answered—not her voice. She had been so sure of him. She had told her mother to see him, the merciful Father Leon, and the mother had been doubtful, but Ysabel said: "Father Leon is a good man. He will help me."

And now when the priest had spoken Ysabel sighed, a long, low sigh of relief and confidence, and then closed her eyes content.

Wrathfulness, but not wrath for the unhappy women, was rising in his heart. "Who is the father?" he asked quietly, but in a tone that would not be denied.

Ysabel opened her eyes and looked full at him again, but said not a word.

"If I am to help you, Ysabel, and you, senora, I must know it all."

"Yes, father, but almost I dare not say the name."

"My daughter, you have nothing to fear."

"It is the young Senor Sagasto, father," said the mother of Ysabel, bending lower her head and still upon her knees.

The lips of the priest tightened like a vise. "The crowning shame," he thought.

"He swore to her she should be his wife, father," said the mother.

"And she shall be," he answered.

"You will bring him, father?" Ysabel spoke for the first time.

"Yes, my daughter, I will bring him. He shall wed you here."

"May I kiss your hand, father?" asked Ysabel. The priest laid his palm on her forehead. She drew the hand to her lips and touched it reverently, then closed her eyes.

"Has he not been here?"

"He has not come, father. I have not seen him for many weeks—not since he knew. Then I asked him to do what he had promised. He said I was too much trouble to him. I thought if he was the son of the senor he would not tell me a lie. He is not like the senor, is he, Father Leon?"

"No, Ysabel, he is not like the senor, he is not indeed. But he shall wed you."

Then the priest comforted them and went away. He strolled along for some distance with bended head, grieving to think how it would grieve Felicia if she knew. She must not know. Somehow, it

must be managed. After a while, perhaps, but not now, not now!

Then he began to look about for Ruiz, and he made inquiry, but no one had seen him. The priest gave the day to no other duty, but continued hour after hour to seek and to inquire. Late in the afternoon he thought of a certain resort which Ruiz often frequented. The priest's wrath and resentment were rising, resentment for poor Ysabel, resentment for Don Sagasto, for Felicia most of all. Felicia! If he could but avert from her the pain and the humiliation of it! And as he thought of her his hand involuntarily made a cross upon his breast, rapt as he was, uncaring who might see. He was absorbed and furious. Something very like a passion of protest was surging within his bosom, protest against himself for whip-cording himself about with the limitations of this black robe he wore. An instant of rebellion, a rare flash of the old revolt and struggle, the man in him wrestling with the priest again, the man demanding to be the thing that men must and that priests forswear, an inburst of the inborn man-hunger to play his part in affairs! If he were not a priest, now! If he had not been a priest at all! If he had not put on this sombre habit! If he had unfrocked himself back there at San Fernando! God! God! God! there must be no "ifs" for him. Perhaps if he had unfrocked and joined the world again, perhaps Felicia—! But there could be no "perhaps" for him. He raised up before him there as he strode along, the photograph of that grey and gaping fragment of a skeleton reposing on his study table, and the brief rebellion of the man in him was quelled again.

He pushed open the door of the place and walked in. He saw men standing before the long, polished bar. He heard the clink of glasses. No one turned to see who came. Priests were not expected there. Then one saw, reflected in a mirror.

"Hell," he said, "there's a priest!" and faced the other way. Then another turned, and as they beheld this strange, distinguished looking figure in a priest's garb, talking ceased. The priest strode straight to the far end of the bar where two had not seen him. He put his hand not lightly on the shoulder of one. "Come with me, Ruiz."

The young senor, faintly maudlin, looked uncertainly at the priest, put his glass upon the bar and slowly turned to him again.

"Why, hel-lo, Father Leon! Glad to see you! Have a drink, father, have a drink! Best damn whisky in town, father! Have a drink with me! Here you, barkeeper, give us a glass for my friend, Father Leon!"

Father Leon perceived there was more bravado than liquor in all this.

"Come with me, Ruiz." The priest's voice was subdued but peremptory, and the expression of his eyes was not reassuring.

"All right, father, if the gen'lemen will excuse me! Will the gen'lemen excuse me?" he maudlinly inquired, wheeling around and addressing all in the room. The priest's manner and his eyes had begun to trouble Sagasto. Father Leon slipped his hand under the right arm of Ruiz and led him out by a side door.

Father Leon had reflected that taking him thus from a public saloon would excite comment, yet his

act would be ascribed only to his active interest in Ruiz. It was dramatic, a thing he abhorred, but it had to be done at once, regardless of circumstances. He would not pick occasion.

"What do you want with me?" asked Ruiz, his head clearing in the fresh air. He was becoming more and more uneasy.

"I will show you, Ruiz."

They turned into the quarter where the Orquez house stood.

"What are you going down here for?" Ruiz asked sullenly.

"You will learn. It should not be necessary for me to be here."

Then Ruiz began to understand that it had in some way to do with that Mexican girl with the big eyes.

"I am not going in there," he exclaimed, as they reached the door.

"Yes, Ruiz, you are going in here with me. And you will do as I say," said the priest sternly, taking Ruiz firmly by the arm.

Father Leon entered without knocking. Ruiz followed. The priest closed the door and slipped the latch to bolt it.

"Go in there," he said curtly, pointing to the door of the bed-room.

Ruiz could not oppose the priest. He went into the room where Ysabel lay.

"Are you sick, Ysabel?" he asked flushing, with no feeling in his voice.

Father Leon turned the cover, and looked at Ruiz. "That is why I brought you here, Ruiz."

"Well, it is not my affair," said Ruiz, surlily.

But he did not meet the eyes of Father Leon nor Ysabel's.

"Ruiz, I shall not temporize with you. You will not leave this room until you are a husband as well as a father. If you make any dispute, if you do not obey me implicitly in all that I may direct I will not only inform your father and your sister, but I will publicly denounce you and I will see that the law compels you to do your full part. It will be useless for you to attempt to evade. I shall spare neither you nor others. Are you prepared to obey me, Ruiz?"

Ruiz understood the full resolution of Father Leon. He could not misread that eye and mouth.

"Well," said Ruiz.

Then the priest wedded them, commanded Ruiz to leave some money with Senora Orquez, commanded that nothing be said until he released them, and promising to return on the day after and often, he went out leaving Ruiz seated by Ysabel on the side of the bed.

CHAPTER XIV

Senor Ramon Makes a Mistake

THE crest of that rising tide of population sweeping ever westward that beat against the base of the Sierras and broke splashing and sprawling over into the valleys of the Pacific coast cast upon the land of the dons but little of the debris of character that littered the west elsewhere from Montana to Mexico, and made of the territories the very paradise of outlawry for more than a quarter of a century. The reign of terror that drew along the confines of New Mexico and Arizona a deadline to arrest the advance of industry and social order stopped before it reached Southern California. Indian wars and border ruffianism made up no small part of the history of the southwest for many a tragic year after the American conquest, but it concerned the land of the dons almost not at all. The Apache and the white fugitive from the states massacred and rioted from Santa Fe to Yuma, but the haciendas on the slopes of San Gabriel and San Fernando sheltered a people contented, prosperous and undisturbed. The history of this land of perennial Junefulness is an untroubled story in the main. Crimes there were, and lawless men, but defiant, widespread outlawry and brigandage were never known. The history

of the land of the dons is almost as tranquil as their skies were sunny and stormless. Restless camp-followers from the grand army of Argonauts who swarmed across the mountain passes and penetrated into the canyons of the gold-inseminate north straggled southward vainly searching for the placers that made millionaires over night up there. The bandits and the bullies, the tomahawk and the tortures, the fagot and the ambush of Arizona, together with the rough-and-tumble roistering mining camps of Calaveras and Tuolumne with their quick fortunes and quicker failures, their tragedies, their romances, their sometimes lawless scenes and their swift and primitive justice, their crucibles of crude experience where men were ground out unpolished, but all man, were types and phases which the chronicler may seldom relate of the land that the padres christianized, the dons of Castile and Mexico covered with their flocks and vineyards and wheat fields and governed from their haciendas, and which the American at last made his own forever.

Hemperton, by no means unimaginative, delighted to discuss with Father Leon the poetic nature, the romantic story and the transcendant charm of the historic region. He delighted to ascend the great fort of a hill that lifted abruptly where the river curved out of San Fernando valley and headed across the lowlands toward the ocean, to indulge his prophetic vision. He saw a mightful city rising upon those ungarnished hills declining easily seaward. He saw that fertile and enverdured plain that flattened away into skyline south and west, and the valley of the San Gabriel sunning its pastures to the east peopled with forceful, thrifty men of his own

compelling race; and towering proudly over the squat and crumbling missions of the sleeping padres he saw the stately spires of theirs and other faiths; he saw the mansions of the affluent and the habitations of busy toilers and emerald miles of citrus groves and fruitful orchards upspringing where the flocks and herds of the dons had contentedly roamed and browsed. Hemperton himself expected to behold the complete reality. The epoch of achievement had already made a promiscuous beginning. The American had flung himself with all his fire and driving self-confidence into the gathering current of the country's making, and he played his part in the world of men with deft hand and sagacious mind. He was quick to see opportunities and prompt to take advantage. He was audacious and calculating. He enjoyed his accreting prestige. He proposed to himself that after awhile when his wealth was secure and ample he would do something in a public way to perpetuate the name which his childlessness might otherwise drop from the lips of his fellows. There were recollections which he had not been able to strike entirely from his mind; there had been that in his youth for which he would like to make amend in his own selfish way. He was relieved that people were indisposed to propound inconvenient questions about his antecedents and his earlier history. If he drove hard bargains or was an exacting creditor it was only business, and he prided himself that he had wronged no man. He had kept his business record unspotted. He had risen well toward the top of the list of successful and prominent men. He had been faithful to the extraordinary woman whom he had discovered in her radiant girlhood out there

on that fine old hacienda, and the tongue of gossip had never connected his name with any infidelity. Taking it all in all the past had been gratifying, and the future was rotund with prospects of still more prosperity.

Hemperton might have hardened less in character, perhaps as he advanced in years and success if there had come children unto him and Felicia. He lost none of his urbanity and ease of manner, but his associates detected a certain tautness in the chords of his nature, as time wore on, that betokened a kind of exsiccating of his earlier sympathies, a slow evaporation of the mellower traits of his younger manhood. There was Constancia, to be sure, the winsome cousin of Felicia, the one young life in the Hemperton household. Constancia was as dear to Felicia, Hemperton knew, as a child not her own could be, and Hemperton himself was fond of her in his rather cold and undemonstrative way. It was evident that she would develop into a girlhood almost as clever and as lovable as Felicia herself had been. Already Constancia was taking on the early beauty of the Sagasto maidens; already she was avenant, sunny and ready-witted, adored as she had ever been by her uncle Cristobal and second only in his affections to his own super-excellent Felicia. Constancia and her cousin passed many of their days at the rancho with the don. Felicia taught her to ride with all her own ease and abandon, and this outdoor wholesome life encouraged and made supremely happy for Constancia and for the senor by Felicia herself, enriched and matured and vitalized Constancia's girlhood, and year after year she put forth more and more of the characteristics

of mind and person that were to reproduce the faithful counterpart of Felicia.

Constancia was as their own in the Hemperton household, still she was not his child, and with him that made all the difference between the joy and disappointment of fatherhood.

But after all he should be well satisfied, this man Hemperton, who years before had come a landless, struggling, unfriended stranger to play a part in the dispossessing of the passing race. What wonder if then, as Hemperton sat looking from his office window out upon the busy street growing busier every year, he was filled with reasonable content as he thought of his success and his position in the community, and of his home. What was the good of running back in memory any further than the afternoon when Felicia rode up to the veranda of the Sagasto home and took his hand so frankly in welcoming salutation? How vividly he remembered, and how sweet the thought of it ever was, the warm, firm grasp of her soft, brown hand, and the fearless outlook from her fine dark eyes! Had not everything that was really worth while in his life begun for him then and there? Had he not reason to be thankful and contented and happy with such a wife? Why should he be sensible of that vague disquiet and some time discontent? Why had he ever been irritable and often harsh and sarcastic with Felicia? Why was he conscious that underlying all the multitude of reasons why he should be satisfied and happy there existed a dark substratum of unhappiness and discontent, a sense of incompleteness, of a vague disquieting something not often realized, not generally dwelt upon, not yet entering

largely into his daily mental state, yet existent and subtly fermenting, just existent enough to qualify the otherwise completeness of his peace? If Felicia were only less resolute and zealous in that impossible religion of hers, that incredible devotion with which his impatience was involuntarily increasing! And after all why should he care about it in the least? Why should she not believe in the whole Roman symbolatry, why not sate herself in all its extravagant and illogical mysticism if she chose? Why should it make any difference whatever to him? Why should he let that trouble him or come between them? Why should he oppose her faith and her devotion, since it need not interfere with him, since she had not obtruded it upon him, since it had not made her bigoted, since it had not narrowed her human sympathies nor erected any barrier between them, husband and wife! Aye, there was the very meat and kernel of it all! Had it not in actuality raised a barrier? Was not that affinity of interest and understanding between Felicia and the brilliant Father Leon a barrier in itself rising higher and higher between them? Was it not preposterous and utterly unworthy of a single thought of his? Why, he interrogated himself over and over again, why, why, why did he ever think about it, why distress self and make his wife uncomfortable about that faith of hers, inasmuch as her life was so exalted, her wifeliness so impeccable, her satisfaction in her faith so supreme? With all his self-interrogation he did nevertheless brood over it as the years were passing, and after awhile take it to bed with him and carry it about with him by day till it was beginning to saturate his very existence, illogical and

unreasonable as he knew it down in the very heart of him to be. That and his own disquieting self-reproach.

Since the day of Father Leon's self-revelation in Hemperton's library, Hemperton had been sensible of a growing constraint. Their companionship had been no less frequent and agreeable, but in spite of himself Hemperton had in course of time begun to feel that the priest was too much a privileged character in the household, and without exhibiting any change in demeanor toward the priest himself his only vague and unanalyzed and unformed resentfulness involuntarily manifested itself in aggravated irritability and inconsiderateness toward Felicia herself.

In the midst of his introspection and abstractedness, one afternoon, General Kenton and Judge Brecknell and old Don Modeno presented themselves at his office to discuss, in a general way, the plans for an irrigation and developing company in which they with Hemperton were to be largely interested. General Kenton represented some moneyed interests in southern New York that were negotiating for certain lands and water owned partly by Hemperton, partly by Don Modeno and others. Ramon Modeno had come with them. He had persistently avoided Hemperton, but this business required his presence.

After the matter that caused the meeting had been disposed of, General Kenton invited Hemperton to accompany him into the mountains some hundred miles north to hunt the following week, and incidentally to look at a mining property.

Yes, Hemperton would go with pleasure. Hemperton invited General Kenton to dine with him that evening.

Then the gentlemen said good afternoon and withdrew, all except Ramon Modeno, who excused himself to the others inasmuch as he desired to speak with Mr. Hemperton privately, he said, if agreeable. Hemperton bowed.

Ramon had come with no intention to hold a private interview with the ever-detested American. That which was now working in his brooding, sinister mind had not occurred to him until after he had entered the office. His mean and sullen nature had never ceased to resent the disappointment which the marriage of Felicia and Hemperton had inflicted upon him. His hatred of the American had slumbered, but its fires were still alive. He had beheld the prosperity of Hemperton with envy, and with all the malignancy of his heart he wished him ill. His crafty brain had groped and planned many a scheme of revenge, but he had lacked the force and courage for execution. Then a way had occurred to him, sitting there, watching this complacent successful man, the hated husband of the woman who he believed would have been his wife had Hemperton not come upon the scene. That was years and years ago, but the sting was still tingling. Not the disappointed love of his youth, perhaps, so much as his detestation of the forceful, sardonic American tortured his uneasy soul and embittered his days.

“Mr. Hemperton, we have not been as good friends as we might have been.”

“I believe it could scarcely be called a Damon and Pythias relation,” drawled Hemperton, wondering what was the purpose of this unsolicited interview, but wholly indifferent.

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Ramon did not exactly know about Damon and Pythias, but the drawl and the tone were exasperating.

"I have no desire to be your enemy, Mr. Hemperton."

"I have not pined, Senor Modeno, to the point of acute anguish for the lack of your regard." The tone and the manner were freighted with indifference and as cutting as the words.

"Mr. Hemperton you saved my life once. I have not forgotten that."

"It is likely, however, that posterity will not be much more sensible of its debts of gratitude to me than you were, senor, on a certain November night some years ago when your peculiar manifestation of esteem came near to undoing me. There are some forms of gratitude from whose demonstrations, senor, I would prefer to be excused."

Ramon's face paled. But he said "I do not know what you mean. However, I have come to do you a service."

Hemperton had risen as he delivered the last thrust, and was now slowly pacing up and down.

"I have come to speak to you about Father Leon."

Hemperton paused.

"He is seen rather more in the company of the Senora Hemperton than would seem to be prudent for a priest." There was just the trace of a sneer on the Spaniard's handsome mouth, and the suggestion of a furtive leer from the glittering black eyes.

Hemperton was silent. His silence was misunderstood by the man sitting there feeding the grudge he had nursed so long.

"You are a busy man, Mr. Hemperton, and perhaps you do not know."

Hemperton turned the steady level of his slightly closed eyes upon Modeno. "Do not know what?" he asked in an even, rather indifferent voice.

"Perhaps you do not know that the priest and the senora go much together to visit people of the parish, and that Father Leon is many times at the home of the senora when you are not there." The sneer of the lips was broader and the leer of the eyes more plain.

There was silence for a little, then the American, with the same level eyes and still almost indifferent voice said:

"Well?"

The Spaniard thought: "These Americans have no spirit. Was there nothing to stir this impassive man of business in the over-much companionship of his beautiful wife, this woman of a passionate race, with the facinating priest whose blood was the same as hers?" Not by the moving of an eyelash had this alien husband betrayed the emotion that the suggestion of Ramon would have kindled in a man of his people. The Spaniard believed himself to be both subtle and adroit. He had supplied no evidence at all on the one hand, but on the other he had said enough to inflame a jealous and a suspicious nature. The American's apparent indifference deceived and exasperated him. The symptoms of the torture which it was his sole purpose to inflict were not forthcoming. The subtle poison seemed not to be working in that cold Saxon blood. When Hemperton uttered his impassive "Well?" Modeno hesitated.

"Is that all, Senor Ramon Modeno?" inquired

the voice, devoid almost of interest, the tone perhaps a trifle raised.

Modeno knew in his heart that he knew nothing whatever. He would have been the last to believe any insinuation against Felicia offered by another. His object was not to injure her but to fret and exasperate her husband. Not understanding Hemperton's nature he totally overlooked the danger that the combustibles which he intended to pile up in the American's magazine of wrath might explode over himself as well, even if it included others in its devastation.

He proposed somehow to prick that bland and imperturbable exterior and to find his way down under the American's icy unconcern where there must reside the elemental passions that could be played upon, even yet, if he could but find them. If fabrication could hit the chord and send a vibrating spasm of pain and jealousy into that immobile face Modeno meant to supply it. How he would exult to see a sparkle of agony in that cold and half-closed eye! What measure of satisfaction for his own long years of misery if he could but excite a single writhe of contortion in that self-complacent and ever self-confident American.

"No, that is not all," said Ramon, vindictively formulating a lie. "Mr. Hemperton, what I tell you is to warn you, that you may forbid the handsome priest your home. He would be a favorite with women if he were not a priest, do you not think? And after all he is but a man, you know."

Then Modeno hesitated. The American was rather ominously composed.

"Perhaps I should not continue, Mr. Hemperton,

but I remember that you saved my life. A Castilian cannot be ungrateful, even if he must wait long to repay."

"I am waiting, Senor Ramon Modeno."

"Well, I will say then that it so happened that I came upon Father Leon and the Senora Hemperton among the trees in your grounds one evening when she was entertaining. The father's arm was—well, Mr. Hemperton, where the arm of a priest should never be. I have said nothing heretofore, but have hesitated long, doubtful if I should tell you. Then I thought yes, I must tell Mr. Hemperton because he saved my life. It seemed to me that the time had come to speak, therefore I am here."

Hemperton moved to the door. Modeno arose, saw him turn the lock, withdraw the key and put it in his pocket, face about and move slowly toward him. Modeno detected quite another expression inscribing lines unseen before across the American's impassive countenance, not the dull indifference that Modeno had interpreted it to be. This was a subtle, shadowy, gusty ripple of emotion that might be an index of awakening wrath or only a Saxon's undemonstrative kindling of interest. But it flashed a telepathic warning to Modeno, who uneasily asked: "Why did you lock the door, Mr. Hemperton?"

"Because, Senor Ramon Modeno, I desire that there shall be no interruption in what I am going to do." The voice was slow and even as before, but the intonation higher and distinctly uncomfortable to hear.

"What are you going to do? Shall I tell you more?" The look of him was disturbing.

"Perhaps, Senor Ramon Modeno, I may kill you

here in this room. Perhaps I shall only choke your damned Spanish throat! I do not know, myself." Then with the swiftness of an explosion Hemperton struck the astounded Ramon full in the face, and as he reeled grappled him by the neck and crushed him to the floor.

"You treacherous, cowardly, Castilian blackguard! Degenerate son of a degenerate race! Say it is all a lie, you hound! Say it is all a lie, a cursed, miserable lie, or by God I will grind my heel into your lying mouth!"

Hemperton's strength was great, and his anger overflowing. His natural temper was violent, but it rarely broke through the poise and composure that characterized his daily commingling with men. But there was a whole regiment of furies piling fuel upon the fires of his hatreds and bitternesses now. Utterly he loathed the Castilian. He felt again the thrust of that steely thing into his ribs on that November night preceding his marriage, and he intended now to inflict full retribution for that as well as a heaping measure of chastisement for the abominably inferential aspersion which this detestable person had peddled out to him concerning Felicia. Hemperton's avenging wrathfulness was double-charged and almost overmastering. As he throttled and crushed that manikin writhing helplessly in his clutches, Hemperton was thoroughly conscious that a consuming thirst to kill was surging through his veins like an intoxicant. It was savagery, but it was indescribably sweet and satisfying to feel that gasping, contorting throat in his tightening fingers, absolutely at the mercy of his will. His onset had been so swift and infuriate and unexpected that

Modeno collapsed like a garroted wayfarer. Hemperton's dissimulation had been complete, and yet it was not dissimulation. It had been entirely unstudied; it was simply Hemperton's way. His impassiveness, while that steamhead of rage was accumulating, left the Spaniard wholly open to surprise, and now Hemperton's exultation of mastery over this limp and limbering enemy, this prostrate peddler of calculating innuendo was overwhelming, absorbing, intense! The temptation to complete the thing could, under but a little more indulging, become irresistible, and his and Felicia's compensation would then be measured full. He could finish with the utmost ease. He had only to clutch his powerful fingers more tightly and hold them long enough and that cruel curling and falsifying mouth would be silenced forever. Still clinching the gurgling throat, Hemperton began to reason swiftly about it. The first transport of his fury had subsided, and directly he began to speculate how long he might be squeezing out the last spark of life in him. Already he was realizing that his murderous impulse had spent its force, but not his downright justifiable anger. He knew in that portentous moment, before his own self-mastery supervened, that never to his dying day would he, could he, forget or regret the indescribable compound of savage blood-hunger and joy of triumph and battle as he felt the warm palpitating flesh and cartilage crunch and gurgitate under his contracting fists.

Had Modeno been able to meet blow with blow and struggle with struggle, had he opposed to the force of Hemperton a force of equal or comparable strength, and thus brought about a sheer contest of

muscle, the chances would have been that Hemperton's rage might have inflamed into crime. The helplessness of Modeno saved him. Murder that purple, gasping, limber, impotent thing! Bah—it were like killing a sheep!

Hemperton let go his fingers and stood erect.

"Get up!" he said.

Modeno had been nearly done for. His breath came and went convulsively for some seconds. Then he gathered himself together, panting, his intumescent and abraded face showing a splotch of blood.

"I trust you will overlook the demonstration, Senor Ramon Modeno, if I have seemed to be unable to appreciate the sincerity of the protestations of gratitude and friendship which you made to me a few moments ago," said Hemperton, with sardonic deliberation and acid inflection. "My mental composition renders me singularly insensible to some of the manners and characteristics peculiar to persons of your temperament. You will oblige me now, if you please, by apologizing for your insinuations, after which I shall have the honor to wish you a very good afternoon."

Hemperton's self-control was quite restored as he began to speak, and when he finished he bowed ceremoniously to the humiliated Spaniard, and waited.

Modeno rested one hand heavily upon the table, shifted uncertainly from leg to leg and wiped his face with his handkerchief, scarcely glancing at Hemperton.

"There will be another chapter to this, Mr. Hemperton."

"Oh! I have no doubt of it, Senor Ramon Modeno, I have no doubt of it!" replied Hemperton, bowing again with mocking deference. "Indeed I have no doubt of it. I shall remain quite at your service, when and wherever you like. In the meantime, however, I shall have to remind you that you have neither apologized nor retracted."

Modeno hesitated, shifted from leg to leg again and with eyes fixed on the floor began: "It is not true, what I have said." His voice was low, almost a whisper, and he said it very like a cat spitting.

"Do I understand you to say, Senor Ramon Modeno, that you lied to me?"

The Spaniard paused. "It was a lie that I told you, Mr. Hemperton."

"Very good, Senor Modeno. That is all." The American unlocked and opened the door. "I believe our interview is concluded," and Hemperton stood by the door, facing and bowing with extreme dignity as young Modeno passed out.

But when Hemperton was alone! If Modeno could have seen him then! If, unobserved by the man who had humiliated him so pitilessly and so abjectly, and who had bowed him so disdainfully out of his presence; if Modeno could have looked upon that constricted countenance for but one brief minute after its mocking placidity flung him a parting defiance, perhaps the Spaniard might then have counted his abasement a victory after all, set against the riven and contorted visage that hid behind those same avenging palms, and swayed and swayed with that swaying tortured bosom where the Spaniard's thrust stuck and rankled like a thistle-burr in tender flesh! Not before this pestilent foe

would Hemperton expose the hurt, but deep into the soul of him the distillation of that falsehood trickled like a Borgian venom; and there, alone, with no eye to see, no ear to hear, his self-command crumbled under the virulence, palsied the chastising muscles and dulled the piercing level of those goading eyes.

Where the fact and where the fabrication, where only the craft and guile of the defeated and vindictive Spaniard, how much the measure of foundation for the damnable and insidious tale? How much of figment and mere fancy, how much corroding, acidulated truth to go on eating away into his peace of mind forever; how much, O God! O God! How much and where and what in this meddling, peddling, detested Castilian's cunning? He would believe it all, he would believe nothing of it whatever. He would believe only this, he would believe only that, he would believe never a word of it. Merciful God! what, what, could he believe? It was only a fiction of that designing Spanish fool who had nourished an ingrowing malice for the defeat of his suitor's hopes! The priest and Felicia! And this malevolent Spaniard had seen! It was unbelievable, and he would not believe it—he durst not, for the very pride of his achievement, for the very peril of destruction into which believing would hurl all the fabric that he had builded through the years. Felicia and the priest! Preposterous and impossible! Yet why had that indefinable resentfulness of Father Leon been slumbering away in the innermost recesses of his consciousness since that revealing confidence of the priest? The priest himself, perhaps, but never Felicia! Never, never in a thousand years that superlative woman, Felicia, whose impeccable and

undefilable soul shone so seraphically and so tranquilly through those lustrous and unfearing eyes.

When Felicia greeted and kissed him an hour later as he entered their home he held her tight to his heart with all the man in him indicting him with shame and dishonor for thinking that evil could be, and he was wroth with himself that he had not fed the hot blood-hunger in him and crushed the guileful Spaniard's gasping throat to the very end.

Then General Kenton came and he bowed very low over Felicia's hand, whitened now since the outdoor life at the rancho had ended, and always satiny, and carried it with great and gallant ceremony to his lips and he vowed, "My dear madam," with his fine old face shining with admiration, that his wife should return with him when he came west again "if for nothing else than to know so charming a lady."

At dinner it was arranged that Hemperton and the general should go to the mountains northward to hunt and see certain mines and call on the general's old friend, General Bradley, who possessed a vast wild property in the Tehachapi.

Felicia had been planning to go to San Francisco. She would ask Ruiz to accompany her to the metropolis. They four would journey together as far as the mountain divide where the general and Hemperton were to leave the train for their excursion.

After dinner Father Leon called and straightway he and General Kenton discovered a great mutual liking.

Hemperton and Felicia, General Kenton and Ruiz Sagasto, whose affair with Ysabel the priest had thus far concealed, went north the following week, the

general and Hemperton leaving the train at the summit, Ruiz and his sister proceeding to San Francisco. General Kenton and Hemperton were eight or ten days in the mountains and at the Bradley rancho. When they reached the station for their return train they were informed that there had been a wreck several miles down the grade. Yes, there were many fatalities, the men about the depot said; the accident had happened during the night.

"Felicia!" thought Hemperton. "I wonder if my wife and her brother have started home yet?" he said to the general.

The agent informed him that a relief train was expected any minute from the south. Hemperton and the general decided to proceed to the wreck if they could get passage on the relief train. The conductor refused at first, but when Hemperton said that he feared his wife had been a passenger on the wrecked train, he and the general were passed.

The Tehachapi wreck is still remembered as the most disastrous in the annals of railroading in California. The brakes of a south-bound train had become unset at the summit while the locomotive was temporarily detached; and the cars—moved backward down the tortuous mountain decline swifter and swifter with no controlling machinery—finally plunged over a curve down a high embankment, heaping car upon car in a pocket-gulch, a shapeless, twisted, splintered wreckage of crushed and telescoped cars and human freight. Every coach save two was destroyed by the fire that quickly ignited. Some dead and some wounded had been removed by an early relief train, but others were still there lying unprotected on the ground, attended

only by survivors who had no appliances, little medicine and less food.

"Mrs. Hemperton? Yes, Mrs. Hemperton was a passenger. She was uninjured," said a man with a red stained bandage around his head, doing what he possibly could for the worse injured.

"Mrs. Hemperton is here, now, somewhere; she is an angel come straight from heaven," he said, "and she narrowly escaped cremation in the wreck, but escape she did, thank God! and hers has been the coolest head in all this sorry lot."

Up there on a low hilltop, under some live-oaks Hemperton found Felicia, a ministering angel indeed. Pale but calm, helpful, encouraging, ministering. She had assisted to bind up bleeding wounds, she had offered consolation to survivors of dead relatives, she had comforted the suffering as best she could. Strangers spoke her name with veneration and many a dying message was confided to her bending ear.

"Such a woman and the priest," reflected Hemperton, and put the impossible thought away.

"I think my brother has been killed," she said with drawn lips but brave eyes. "I cannot find him. I think he is under the wreck, burned."

The injured and the dead and the uninjured were put aboard the relief train, and thus Hemperton and Felicia and General Kenton reached the pueblo, the stricken ones blessing the calm, sympathetic woman as she bade them goodby at the home station.

CHAPTER XV

Mr. Marston Pollock

MORE years came and went, and more of those royal pageants of Christmas days with their robes of purples and crimsons and opals and orange-gold flung over the shoulders of San Jacinto and Baldy and thence far out across the glassy ocean to the expectant crags on Catilina.

And the years piled sorrows thickly on the head of Don Sagasto. The death of Ruiz had aged him, and the swift occupation of the region by Americans filled him more and more with a sense of unfamiliarity and solitude. Most of the companions of his youth had remained in the neighboring republic, and the associates of his middle manhood were scattered or departed, all save a few. Don Modeno had gone, and old Otero, the fiery fighter who had been his chief reliance on that dreary journey overland, years and years ago, when both were young, bringing their families through the harrowing ordeal of Apache assault and desert sun.

"You Americans are crowding us out," Don Sagasto said to Judge Brecknell. "My people will be wholly extinguished in a few years more. I belong to another period, and I am not at home in the new. If my son had survived, and if I could have seen him adapting himself to the new order,

becoming one of you, if he had supported the pride and the rank of our name as I long hoped he would, I could have gone hence content."

The don and the judge were smoking and exchanging confidences on the veranda at the old don's home, whither the judge had gone for quail. The judge was one of the few congenial spirits privileged on the don's narrowing domain, and among the rare old bottles in the don's still plethoric wine house. The judge had religiously set himself to brighten the melancholy that was hovering like a fog over his friend's declining days. Well he understood the intense pride of the don in the family name, a pride which he knew to be justified by the family record and by the don's not illustrious but honorable and upright life, and he knew that his disappointments were correspondingly bitter. He knew that the name would expire with Sagasto, and that the prospect of that inevitable extinguishment was a grief beyond words to the ambitious old man. Therefore he strove, and so did Felicia and Father Leon, to break the force of the disappointment, or rather to help to cultivate in the don a philosophical spirit and to keep alive his natural sunniness of disposition. The don was sensible of and grateful for their consideration, their sympathy and their understanding; but his bruised old heart could not be comforted. He had suffered too much. His griefs were beyond consolation, and he went his solitary way uncomplainingly with stately fortitude, saying to few save his chief companion, the judge, "I am the last!"

The childlessness of Felicia had been a further and piercing disappointment. There remained only

Constancia to transmit his blood, but not his name. And Constancia spent with her uncle on the rancho many of those ambrosial sunny days, clinging to the old man's hand as they strolled under the peppers, as in the days of her elfin sovereignty, and into the rose garden to whose glories she fell the natural heir when Cousin Felicia went away to a home of her own.

Her uncle rode with her as he and Felicia had ridden during her girlhood, and during vacation days from the convent studies she and the don enjoyed many a morning and moonlight ramble where Cousin Felicia had rambled in the sunny past, imbibing, as Constancia was imbibing now, the love for outdoor life, the ennobling unrestraint, love for the glorious air and the abrupt mountains and changeful colorings, the couchant, tawny hills, the mighty spread of wheat, and all the efflorescence and majesty of the valley that had nurtured the surpassing health and feminine perfection of Felicia, and which were rapidly perfectionating the girlhood lines and contour of this last bud of the Sagasto family tree.

"I like better to be here with you, uncle, than with Felicia. Oh, I don't mean that I do not love Felicia," she added quickly, as she read surprise in his eyes. "Indeed I love Felicia above everyone but you, Uncle Tobal; but Cousin Wayne is cross with me sometimes, and I do not like people to be cross.

"Uncle Tobal," and the lovely head reposed against the don's big chest, and his arm rested across her shoulders. "May I ask a question?"

"Why certainly, my pet; what is it?"

"Perhaps I should not ask it. But I love Cousin Felicia very dearly, and do you think, Uncle, that she is entirely happy?"

Was Cousin Felicia entirely happy! Ah, was she indeed, that dear, brave daughter of his. The same disquieting interrogation had propounded itself many a time to the don during recent years, but he had striven to put it from him unanswered and unconsidered. Was his Felicia happy? Ah, how the old don wished with all the yearning of his aching father's heart that he could truthfully answer to himself that he believed she was. And was this mere girl, Constancia, seeing or rather vaguely feeling something that he himself had uncertainly felt rather than observed? If she too, this child in years, had seen and had felt those undefinable and almost imperceptible manifestations of conjugal incompleteness that had touched his supersensitive perceptions, there must be something more ominous than the mere imaginings of a fond and anxious parent, there must be something existent and observable. Constancia had grown from childhood almost to womanhood with the Hempertons. She had exhibited early in her development the quick mentality and many of the finer traits of character of her cousin. And understanding that her perceptions were keen, the don was troubled all the more. She must have seen. Had there, then, been that to see as well as that to feel? he wondered, uneasily. Had this sensitive, reaching mind of his niece really observed what he, with fewer opportunities, had sometimes thought that he perceived?

The don dreaded, profoundly dreaded, to put another question. He hesitated so long that Con-

stancia lifted her head and glanced with quick search into his face.

Without looking at her he said: "Why should your nimble brain be imagining such things, my dear? Of course your Cousin Felicia is happy. Why should she not be? You are too young, Constancia, to speculate about relations that you do not understand." The don was so apprehensive that his anxiety manifested itself in what came near to being indignation that she had dared to see, much less to say, and there was a touch of something akin to reproach in that last tone of his.

"Now there, Uncle Tobal, you are angry."

Her slim fingers, browned by sun and air, fumbled with his collar. "I am not so very old, I know, Uncle Tobal, but Judge Brecknell said only the other day that I am as clever as Felicia was when she was a girl, and I have heard him say that she was the cleverest girl he ever knew."

Of course it was out of the question that the don could resist this delicious bit of feminine reproof and vanity, and he straightway drew her head to him and kissed her hair and called her tender names, very much as a real, sure-enough lover might have done, and just as a real and sure-enough lover would do some day not long hence before many more of those Christmas pageants had come and gone.

"Well, Uncle Tobal, of course you know I would not say such a thing to any one but you, still I am afraid sometimes that Cousin Felicia is really unhappy. I heard Cousin Wayne say a dreadfully cross thing to her once. He said Cousin Felicia is a fool to think so much of the forms and superstitions of her church. He said he had half a mind to destroy

the statue of the Virgin on the shrine in Felicia's room. He did not know I heard, I am quite sure. I was coming downstairs and Cousin Wayne and Cousin Felicia were in the living room. I did not mean to hear, uncle, but I did hear, nevertheless. And I heard Cousin Felicia reply quietly that it was the cause of great unhappiness to her that Cousin Wayne felt that way, because she loved her church, oh! so dearly and that it had been the church of her fathers for many generations, and that there had been many pious men and women among her people. Then I stood still. It was wrong, I suppose, but truly, Uncle Tobal, I just couldn't help it. Then I heard Cousin Felicia say: 'Please, Wayne, do not say to me that I, your wife, am a fool! I love you, my husband, and when you speak these harsh words you wound me deeply.' Then she said: 'Kiss me, Wayne, and say you do not mean it.' I am not sure, but I think Cousin Wayne did not kiss Cousin Felicia, because I heard him walk away, and I went on downstairs, and Cousin Felicia was pale and there was a hurt and indignant expression on her face when I entered the room. I was going to say something to Cousin Wayne, but he went right past me without a word and left the house. Then Cousin Felicia kissed me and called the carriage and drove with me to the convent."

Everything that was worth while had seemed to be slipping faster and faster away from Don Sagasto; and now, crowning all, was this adored daughter—the image of his idolized Gloria sleeping somewhere under the scorching sands of Arizona—was Felicia, this fair, dear child of the love of his youth, was she to face for the remainder of her life a grief that he,

her father, might see and be unable to assuage? Was it indeed possible that Hemperton could not appreciate the lofty nature that had transplanted its precious self into his, this gracious, gifted woman who had poured the generosity of her character like an anointing grace into the selfish fiber of this wandering, nameless American and enriched him with a love and a fidelity of surpassing worth?

From the depths of the old don's aching heart curled the tongues of a rising rage as small tongues of flame encircle fresh fuel on embers long concealed; rage and protest against the utter causelessness for the coming of this ominous shadow into the life of his beloved Felicia; wrath for the man whose nature never had, it thus appeared, after all the years, never risen to her own high level; protest against his own helplessness to afford relief.

"Constancia, this is a dreadful thing you have told me. I dare not think how mournful a meaning it may portend. I must hope that Mr. Hemperton does not frequently speak in such a manner to Felicia. I prefer to believe that he was merely provoked about something for the time being. Too frequently that is the case with men. The best of them are rude sometimes to their wives without being at all bad or harsh."

"I think Cousin Wayne was very wrong though, Uncle Tobal, don't you, to speak so to Cousin Felicia? Why, she is the best and sweetest and the gentlest woman in all the world. And everybody loves her, too."

"Mr. Hemperton should not say such things to your cousin, even if he thinks them, my dear. He should respect the piety of so good a woman as

Felicia, for her sake, even if he cannot for other reasons."

The old don's heart was yearning to comfort this childless daughter, yearning to gather her into his father-arms again, and from her own lips learn the complete truth. He tried to argue himself into believing that the situation was not really so serious as it seemed. Yet, in the course of his tarrying at his daughter's house, his father-eyes had seen and his father-ears had heard those indefinable somethings that enter, in their minute yet significant way, into the character of the daily familiar domestic relation, the intonations of the voice, the involuntary unguarded expression of the eye, that speak as eloquently as spoken language and reveal the secret workings of the mind.

The senor minified to his niece the revelation, yet he could have told her, but would not, how he had heard his son-in-law utter veiled sarcasms, not infrequently either, in the presence of Father Leon upon themes that to the priest were sacred. Nor would the don admit to Constancia how his own forebodings had grown, of late, in spite of his determination to minimize their cause, forebodings that Constancia's prattle had confirmed and magnified.

On the other hand the clear mind of the girl had put itself in quick, communicating sympathy with her uncle's distress. Each read more of the other's thought than either cared to or dared express.

Constancia might have told of biting things that her Cousin Wayne had said, not often it is true, but still once was one time too many between him and such a woman as Felicia; but tell him she did not—then.

She might have told that once, not so long ago, after Father Leon had dined with them and had departed, her Cousin Wayne had said, "What a pity that such a brain was being wasted on idolatries and absurdities of that sort," and that he further said, "Father Leon was becoming too familiar," but she did not tell—not then.

She might have told that her Cousin Wayne had once said to her while she was waiting for Felicia preparing to attend service: "I hope, Constancia, that as you grow older you will see the folly of doing as your Cousin Felicia does, and give up all that nonsense," and when she had stared in half-angry surprise and had exclaimed, "Why Cousin Wayne, what do you mean?" he had replied irritably: "There! there! never mind, all women are simpletons about religions and priests, anyway," but say it she did not—then.

Yet the senor felt she had more to tell, and that sometime he would hear it. He knew that her alert perceptions were being quickened by the slow conflict that must already be waging before her and that all the sympathy and the tact and the strength of this last daughter of his strong people would be invoked for the aid of Felicia and for the imperiled family peace. He knew that his daughter's fierce pride would envelop her in an impenetrable reserve, and that if she were really to suffer to the end with a brave and smiling front not even he, her own father, would dare to attempt to penetrate into the sanctuary of her silence.

Still he would not by any means pass final judgment yet on Hemperton? He would excuse him, even to himself, arguing that his son-in-law was a strong

and assertive character of virile and independent mind and a busy man of affairs. If Hemperton were only to confine his taunts to religious matters, he thought, it might not be so bad after all! If, only, out of this delicate, dangerous, pregnant incompatibility of faith, so fruitful, the don well knew, of other misunderstandings and infelicities, there were not to sprout the thistle-seeds of correlated dissimilarity and spring up a thicket of discord to trap and entangle and lacerate these two lives whose happiness and whose concord were his supreme concern!

That evening Judge Brecknell came from the city again to shoot quail. He had taken the liberty, he said, to bring with him young Mr. Marston Pollock, a recent graduate of an eastern college, who had presented a letter from an old friend of the judge, upon the strength of which Pollock had been admitted to the judge's office.

"You are welcome, sir," said the don, as he always did to those who came to that hospitable establishment, as he had when years before he advanced to welcome the man who afterward bore his Felicia away.

"You are welcome, sir," and he took the hand of the young lawyer and looked full into his eyes, as he had looked full and straight at Hemperton years and years ago.

"This is my niece, Senorita Sagasto, Mr. Pollock," said the don, and Constancia put out her sunbrowned hand, soft and firm as the hand of Felicia had been when she greeted Hemperton.

The rosy old judge took the maiden's hand, and bending low as a cavalier raised it to his lips as a

cavalier might have done, and vowed that Constanca was quite another Lady Felicia, as a cavalier might have said it. The judge always called her "the Lady Felicia." And when the judge compared any woman with the Lady Felicia she knew that was the judge's extremest and sincerest praise. The judge apostrophized the Lady Felicia, and took no pains to disguise his unbounded admiration of her beauty and her mind, and the judge's wife had lovingly boxed his ears and admonished him many times upon the unseemliness of a man of his years and parts remarking thus upon the beauty of another man's wife. Whereat the judge positively refused to be contrite.

So Mr. Marston Pollock looked into the dark and lustrous eyes of the maid Constanca and noted that she was fair to see, and being a lad of parts and good address he proceeded to make himself altogether agreeable to this pretty niece of the don. And the pretty niece of Don Sagasto made instant note that young Mr. Marston Pollock was a fine built lad with a solid fist and a fearless eye that looked full into hers. And this pretty niece of the fine old don was soon chumming away, as an old friend might and as a good friend should, with Mr. Marston Pollock in the rose garden, while October's shades and colors crept across the valley from the western hills and up San Fernando peak, and the gold and the rose of the sea-hid sun suffused the sky and all the face of things.

And young Mr. Marston Pollock was altogether astonished and much put out when a treasured mission bell clanged the call to dinner. For though maidens were many and maidens were fair, yet this

fair niece of the don was the rarest maid of them all, thought Mr. Marston Pollock, lawyer. It suddenly occurred to this young man that there were many ways of spending a day's vacation more interestingly than in tramping through brush and peering into canyons after elusive quail. Really, he would prefer to pass a day under these gnarled old pepper trees, inhaling that ocean air and, yes, and asking this pretty niece of the don about everything.

Ah. Mr. Marston Pollock! Mr. Marston Pollock! Be not over-anxious to find and to do. It shall be given to you, Mr. Marston Pollock, to know about things, and to do, ere many of these Christmas pageants shall come and go, and your young man's heart shall be heavy and hot, but your young man's duty shall be done as a man should do.

CHAPTER XVI

With the Passing of Time

ALTHOUGH Hemperton's character had undergone a change, yet the people of his world had failed to observe it. He was no less urbane, no less popular, no less a good fellow as men come and go. He was regarded as a sharp, shrewd, exacting man of business, but not unreasonable beyond his dues. Years and prosperity had filled out his strong frame with comfortable flesh, and natural decision of character drew closer the lines about a mouth that was well concealed by the black beard still unstreaked with gray. But if he preserved his urbanity with men of business, Felicia was all too sensible of the change that years had wrought in her husband, though not a syllable of protest passed her lips. She had been intensely proud of this forceful man who had shouldered his strong way along, not wholly regardless of the rights of others but with a compelling assertion of his own interests that carried him triumphantly over many an obstacle that would have tripped, if not discouraged, a man of softer mettle. There were wealthier men in the town, and there were more pretentious homes than his, but no man's reputation was less illaudable, no hospitality more valued, nor was another home believed to lodge a happier

or more companionable or less inharmonious pair. Felicia had been secretly exultant in the steady rise of her husband. During the earlier years his devotion and consideration had been unqualified. They had filled each other's life round and full. Their domestic sky had been unflecked by a single cloud, and their wealth, their intelligence, their taste and generosity, and the charm and beauty of Felicia had attracted to them the best minds in the community; and not until her husband had begun to express aversion to some forms of her worship, had there developed the slightest symptom of domestic friction.

Hemperton's earlier manifestations of a changing character, or altering views it would better be termed, perhaps, had taken the hurtless form of lightly sarcastic pleasantries, regretted by Felicia not deeply, but still regretted, though in no sense resented. She had never obtruded her faith upon him. She had wished devoutly all these years that he might eventually subscribe to her religion and worship at the altar of her church, but she had argued almost not at all after she discovered that the theme was increasingly distasteful to him. It had been a joy to her that Wayne had frequently accompanied her to Father Leon's congregation in the earlier years of their married life, and his discontinuance was her first poignant disappointment.

Felicia was a devout, but by no means a bigoted or narrow believer. The demand that some confessors would have made, that her confidence be absolute and without reservation, had never been presumed by the priest who was also her faithful friend, nor would Felicia have subscribed for an instant to a priestly regulation that would have

raised even the filmiest curtain between herself and Wayne. Felicia was devout because her heart was good and pure and because her character was noble; she was a Catholic far more by inheritance, by the force of ancestral example than by any carefully reasoned-out conclusion as to the superiority of the Catholic plan of salvation, or the priority of Rome's vicarship. She was devout because she was good, not good because she was devout. The ritual and the rosary, the confessional and the aves were with her not a means of grace, only processes and accessories, but they were endowed with sweet and sacred significance for this clear and pure-minded woman. These ceremonials were not the essence of religion, but only media for expression of spiritual feeling.

Hemperton sometimes irreverently taunted her with worshipping the image of the Virgin, which to her was consecrated not only because it was one of the sacred accessories of her church, but because it seemed to her that that which it symbolized should be held in reverence by all mankind civilized enough to understand the sanctification of motherhood; to her it signified not the Divine Motherhood of Christ alone, but the holiness of motherhood itself.

Her constant contact with people, the opulent and the unattaining, with the contented and the discontented, with the comfortable and the wretched, kept her sympathies fresh and her nature unwarped. Had she been a kind of a recluse, living only in the rituals and symbolisms of her church, in the machinery instead of in the spirit, had she been satisfied with mere stilted formulas instead of dipping deep and joyously into its pulsating life, then she might have retreated into chilling bigotry and the mainsprings

of her existence might have grown rusted and creaky. As it was, her Catholicism was less a creed than an opportunity, her church less an end than an instrument. Father Leon's lofty and sympathetic character gave him unerring insight into the sensitive nature of his chief parishioner, and upon her he imposed no vexatious parochialisms but he delighted to encourage her mind to the most uncircumscribed latitude.

And over and above every other consideration the priest loved her. She was utterly beyond him, removed and exalted and forever set apart from him, and from the solitary heights of his priesthood he could only gaze raptly across that impassable chasm to the loftier heights of her wifedom, and silently and reverently adore; but silently and reverently adore he would and did to the end of his strong and honest and consecrated life. And Felicia would never know, never even suspect. That adoration for her was for the knowledge of no human being. It was a matter between himself and his God alone. He would have taken refuge from temptation by sequestering himself in the wilderness of Africa before he would have so much as disturbed by the flip of an eyelash the exquisite relationship and consecrated comradeship that had so long endured between them.

The priest not only never came between Felicia and her husband either in his priestly or personal capacity, but, because of his lofty and spiritualized adoration for her, he forebore the exercise of every priestly privilege that might have raised but impalpable barriers to fret the tranquility of her wifedom; and there would have been no beginning to the

mournful days that came had not Hemperton, under the operation of those unaccountable metamorphoses that sometimes late in life misshape natures far more symmetrical than his had ever been, begun first to sneer at his wife's beliefs and from that indulged in tart and biting flings that burned her loving soul like acids.

From caustic words about her "Romish superstitions" to stings and flings concerning the ways and doings of their daily life was but a progression, or a retrogression.

Felicia at first hurt, then amazed, then wounded, then sick and sore at heart, never ceasing to grope for what had wrought this change that was making of a devoted husband a domestic Torquemado—had settled herself to endure with what fortitude she might the cruel transformation. Resign herself to it she could not and would not. Face it and not flinch she could and did, and not a man or woman among all that crossed the threshold of the Hempertons—not even Father Leon until long after the torture upon Felicia had become excruciating—suspected that that gracious and winning countenance masked a heart in anguish, that within that gentle bosom an eroding disappointment was insidiously consuming the strength of that faithful and enduring soul.

Hemperton had in the course of time aroused the priest's suspicion of Felicia's inquisition by his slow change of attitude toward Father Leon.

The ambuscaded thrusts, which the priest thought in execrable taste, but not vicious nor necessarily indicating a new phase in his friend's character, intensified after a time into direct, aggressive and

unsparing assaults, never upon the priest himself but always upon Rome and the practices and polity of the church. Then the priest divined that he could scarcely be the sole recipient of the shafts from Hemperton's long-bow. He apprehended that some of those poisoned arrows must be striking Felicia and discomforting her, and thereupon he was filled with concern on her account. The priest was utterly unable to understand it. He groped for a reason for the increasing, aggressive animosity of the old friend who had formerly been tolerant though unbelieving, indulgent though unsympathetic.

The priest could trace back to no adequate cause, he could predicate no logical sufficing motive for this unhappy change from patience to tantalizing. Hemperton's interest in Father Leon and his enthusiasms had endured so long, and had become so much a familiar matter-of-course, that this new posture of critical and contentious fault-finding seemed to the priest to amount almost to a form of apostasy. And the good man grieved over the strain put upon his relations with Hemperton by these unreasonable, unseasonable and unprovoked assaults.

He feared, moreover, that Felicia was undergoing much distress, but no more would he have presumed to allude to the subject, notwithstanding his relation of priest and confessor and dearest friend, than he would have undertaken to pry into the sanctuary of the disappointment of her denied motherhood itself.

Had it not been for his profound admiration for Felicia, his almost spiritualized affection for her, he would have adopted a far different course with Hemperton. For one thing he would have avoided

a profitless wrangle, but if combat had been forced upon him he would have poured an unanswerable cannonading broadside into Hemperton's fighting, but far less powerful craft and sent the scoffer's splintered timbers to the bottom. But to have engaged in a controversy of that kind under existing circumstances would have precipitated strained and heated relations at the Hemperton home, and therefore for Felicia's sake the priest forbore. He preferred to bear Hemperton's tormenting thrusts with good nature and to reply without acerbity. He continued to hope that this trying and unfortunate phase of his friend's character would eventually disappear; but meantime it grieved him that Felicia must be disquieted and perhaps even suffering.

Naturally, it never occurred to Father Leon that jealousy could be a contributing cause—that jealousy of him, the privileged and ever-welcome priest, could be poisoning the mind and disintegrating the friendship of Hemperton. He adored Felicia and should as long as he lived, but never would she or Hemperton know. God alone shared that holy confidence, and God would not condemn a love so purified and so sublimely mastered. Years and years ago that love had been inspired out of that privileged association as they had ridden together over the sunny slopes and around those shimmering wheat fields, under the red-berried pepper branches and the glaucous olive groves of San Fernando—the Felicia who ministered to his sick and lonely, who reigned over the parish and over Father Leon himself like an imperious but confiding sovereign; the priest had never underestimated his own strength, and the consecrated secret was forever safe. There was no taint of

impiety about it. Time and his own strong manhood and the loftiness of his regard had sublimated his love and incorporated it into a part of his very religion, and the peace of the Hempertons was eternally secure so far as the priest himself was concerned.

The love for no woman was for him, instrument of Rome, but there was no power lesser than Omnipotence able to reverse the currents of his nature and interdict the love that he, priest of Rome, cherished for Felicia. Unrestrained and unspiritualized it might have made him illabile. Idealized, de-humanized, controlled as he had controlled and spiritualized it, it was a benediction and a progression. To have loved her as a strong-natured man wholesomely loves a woman, and then to extirpate every sentiment and vestige of that love from his mind and heart and being would have been one thing, and not uncommon. But that he, a Catholic vicar, heart-panoplied with all the temperamental characteristics of his Latin blood, should have been saturated heart and soul and mind and body with this sweet idolatry; and yet, comprehending the bottomless peril of undertaking to carry this love restrained and unspoken through all his life, deliberately confronting and accepting the hazardous possibilities of being over-mastered by it, yet choosing that rather than exorcizing it once and forever from his heart, was a spectacle of courage of entirely another kind, a courage that called for the most exalted self-confidence and self-command and was possible only to an heroic and masterful nature. He had proposed to himself to go on adoring this dear companion of his young priestship and his

young manhood, and even so he had. In the days before her wifedom, while his youth was ardent and her girlhood free, when the man in the priest cried out to be untethered from the cloth, when he had lifted his arms in imploratory anguish and prayed his obsecrating prayers before the Virgin and paced the aisles of the chilly mission, and resolutely fixed his gaze on the skull upon his study table, and held high aloft before his straining eyes the blessed crucifix—then it was that the struggle had been fierce and sometimes even doubtful. But the priest had conquered, even before Hemperton appeared, and the strong man's soul was at peace, but the strong man's love went strongly on adoring, though speechless and subtilized. Around that consecrated love he drew the circle of his holy faith and planted the enduring standards of his vows to God and to Rome, and on through the years he had loved his love, while the priest stood guard for the man who touched not to cross the sacred divide.

No, the priest could not know, because his own heart had been pure, because he had kept the faith with himself; the priest could never know until the mournful revelation in years to come that a secret torment had through a long period of time gnawed at the main-springs of Hemperton's life and had insidiously disintegrated, as it were, the fiber of his mind, rendering it susceptible to untoward and morbid influences and unfounded jealousies, distorting its natural operations and shaping it to sinister and woeful conclusions.

The priest could not know that his own personality had, under the mysterious alchemy of a conscience cancerous with the burden of misshapeness and

misdirection, become a source of irritation to the man to whom the priest's self-renunciating life was a perpetual reproof of his own self-indulgence. He could not know that Hemperton had first become jealous, not of this splendid type of physical manhood's comradeship with his beautiful wife of like race and faith, but jealous of their kinship of pure life and their fellowship in right-thinking; and afterward, inoculated with the virus of that disease of mind, developed a baser jealousy of the priest himself.

Hemperton had never admitted to himself that the sting of Ramon Modeno's malignity had found lasting lodgment in his heart; that Iago's part had not been subtly played, but the bacillus that slumbered long had multiplied at last and Hemperton was writhing under its slow torment.

Neither Father Leon nor Felicia suspected the unhappy working of Hemperton's mind. Utterly without guile, wholly at peace in a comradeship of well-doing and intellectual sympathy, a sympathy in which the husband of Felicia had once borne an equal share, both Felicia and the priest, though they never even hinted at the unwelcome theme, never even remotely imagined that jealousy was figuring direfully in what they ascribed to be Hemperton's growing agnosticism, or worse, a possible positive disbelief.

That of itself was misfortune enough, Felicia thought, that this dear husband of hers should stray thus entirely away beyond any hope she had long clung to that he would sooner or later find solacing rest in the church, but that he should visit upon her not only satire and sarcasm and jibe on the subject of her religious belief, but also flouts and taunts and

biting words wholly separate and disassociated from and having no bearing upon her faith—that was the transcendent grief. She carried no part of her sorrow to the priest, nor did she take refuge in confiding it to her father. She bore it alone. That Wayne's love for her had expired she did not believe. He had become unlovingly inattentive and inconsiderate, and often pained her with his harshness, but still Felicia believed in his love. She was positive that he was undergoing mental inquietude of some kind, a torturing something that was wreaking havoc in their happiness and beclouding their future, but she clung to her confidence in his ultimate restoration to the Wayne of her youth.

Her one great disappointment, until her husband's character began to sour and his harshness to despoil her joy, had been their childlessness, and many a supplication she had offered to the Blessed Virgin and to the God of her fathers that the miracle of motherhood might yet be wrought to bring her husband back to her and weld their lives as one again.

There came a day in the midst of her deepening misery that fired her with fresh hope. As she was riding in her carriage there happened to be an urchin mourning over his pet dog injured to the death by a kick of a horse. Although Felicia had a companion in the carriage, she alighted, comforted the lad and herself binding the broken leg and taking boy and dog into the vehicle, drove to the child's home; and then, it appearing that the dog must be killed, she then and there added another to the list of boys who vowed her the princess of boydom by promising a pup from her own kennels.

She told her husband of the incident. Hemperton was generously gratified by her acts of considerateness and generosity. He was in a mood more like the Wayne she had wed, and the act pleased him. He kissed her and declared she was even lovelier than years before, and with his arm around her in the old, old way he insisted that they go at once and select the pup. Felicia's love for dogs and horses, taught by contact with the fine creatures that her father bred, had clung to her, and she rode and drove as in days gone by, and her dogs were her special pride.

Felicia's spirits bloomed and blossomed under her husband's praise and affection and together they strolled, as loverlike as ever, among those trees where he had made tender speeches to her willing ears, in the years before the change came upon him, and that brave and faithful heart beat full of joy again and full of hope that the cloud had lifted at last, and that the sun of their happiness obscured so long would shine again henceforth.

Then Hemperton proposed a yachting cruise for a week in Catalina waters, and Felicia joyfully assented. Many were the sea outings they had enjoyed gliding over those blue and pellucid depths where Hemperton had inducted her into the fascinations of the gentle art of angling and where she learned the coquetry of the shy rockbass and the greedy tugging of the yellowtail.

Constancia, who had completed her convent course, and Mr. Marston Pollock, if he could spare the time, and the Otera ladies, and Don Sagasto and Major Frawley and Lieutenant Thornton of the military family of the general commanding the

department of Arizona, whose headquarters were in the pueblo, were to comprise the party.

They sailed from San Pedro on an August morning, out into the channel rippling under a yachtman's breeze, and past Point Fermin. The long, blue line of the island, rising almost perpendicularly against the southwest sky was ever in those days a favorite landmark of the sportsman and the angler. Wild goats browsed on its precipitous hills and the clear waters around it swarmed with fish. Into the half moon and surfless bay where storms but rarely swept, a thousand pleasure craft would one day poke their prows; but on the day when Felicia, happy in the restoration of her husband's old-time loving attention, sailed into the placid little port, the splash of oars was an unfamiliar sound, and the wild goats peered from rocky heights on the strange things that idled on the glassy sea.

Mr. Marston Pollock regretfully sent his excuses, as business entrusted by the judge, his partner, was most pressing. But young Major Frawley and young Lieutenant Thornton hovered about that pretty niece of the fine old don, and baited her hooks and pointed out picturesque things on the hills, and called to her to see where a whale was blowing off there in the south, and took the rockbass she caught, and when a yellowtail grabbed impudently at the bait intended strictly for less strenuous fish the pretty niece of the fine old don didn't scream for aid, oh! bless you no; but would Lieutenant Thornton please take the line; and the lieutenant saved the fish, and the pretty niece of the fine old don was the pleasedest girl you ever saw, and young Lieutenant Thornton and Major Frawley really could not per-

suade themselves that they were in the least sensible of the absence of Mr. Marston Pollock.

And Constancia, though really she thought Mr. Marston Pollock a most agreeable young gentleman, as they had chatted in the rosy twilight that evening at her uncle's rancho, and although she had chatted other times with him, and although the agreeableness of Mr. Marston Pollock was certainly unmistakable and his manners most engaging and the look of him quite good for a maiden fair to see, still the lieutenant and the major were clever and sensible and their bearing brave and soldierly, as became young men of the commanding general's family; and the pretty niece of the fine old don, just turning twenty, really had not missed Mr. Marston Pollock as much as—but there, there, that will do! That a maiden of twenty should even be presumed to miss any young gentleman of brief acquaintance, even though the look of him was good, were better unsaid, don't you think?

The week was one of old-time joy to Felicia, because her husband was again the Wayne of her youth. She would not ask him to remain thus henceforth, lest she break the spell, and the spell was sweet to this loving wife, for the love of her youth was the love of her life.

But Lieutenant Thornton and Major Frawley were entirely devoted to Constancia, and it was most surprising what a lot of things two young men could find to do and to say to a pretty niece of a fine old don in one small ship on a sunny sea. They fetched and they carried, they baited and waited and brought her things to eat and insisted that she accept them, although "really and truly" she was

not the least bit hungry; and they made most remarkable discoveries of sweetmeats in most mysterious and unheard of places for sweetmeats to be found on board a yacht; they sang college songs and some very proper and pretty love ditties in fine and manly voices, and both vowed that the fine old don, her uncle, had the most courtly ways, was the most wonderful fisherman, could tell the most entertaining stories of the early days and was altogether one of the delightfulest characters they had ever been honored in knowing; and of course this pretty niece of the fine old don was mightily pleased, and these attentive young men could not, if they had particularly set about it, have devised a theme more sure to please this winsome fisher-maiden than by praising her idolized old uncle.

There was nothing untoward until the day fixed for return, and then what happened was not much. Hemperton was reclining leisurely near the bow when Lieutenant Thornton shouted that a string of small fish dangling in the water had loosened and was slipping away. It was near Hemperton who, straightening quickly, reached for the line just as the boat lurched a bit. Of course he lost his balance and plunged headforemost into the sea. Being a swimmer, and close to the boat, there was not any danger at all. He clambered aboard, laughing and sputtering, really not vexed by his unintended bath. Felicia paled and her very heart stopped, but he was into the sea and out again so quickly that she had no time for action.

But Lieutenant Thornton, as he gave a hand to pull Hemperton aboard, noticed that on his left jaw the soaked and streaming beard parted over a small,

redding scar, and that Hemperton hastily brushed with his hand the beard to conceal it; and the lieutenant saw, moreover, that the exposure of the scar had annoyed Hemperton.

There was much sport and jollyng at Hemperton's expense, but Felicia did not relish it, and she presently put an end to it, though Hemperton himself was as deep as others into the fun.

The anxiety of Don Sagasto for the happiness of Felicia was considerably relieved by the experience of the cruise. The lightnings of domestic friction which he had feared might be playing around the head of this dear daughter seemed to have ceased. Not even a far away flash of them had riven their domestic sky on this pleasant voyage. The manner and devotion and temper of his son-in-law were beyond reproach, and the don ventured to indulge the hope that, however much a storm had threatened, the cause, whatever it might have been, was now removed.

The senor and his niece exchanged frequent and speechful confidences of the eyes, and as days passed these wordless exchanges conveyed mutual relief and hope.

But when the yachting party broke up there were a couple of military young gentlemen quite inconsolable, who vowed to themselves that that cruise must be repeated even if they were reduced to the extremity of discounting a month's pay to provide the means, and who would cheerfully have exchanged a soldier's life for a sailor's, the army for the navy, provided of course that their battleship were a fishing yacht, and the captain's daughter the pretty niece of a fine old don of the old regime.

CHAPTER XVII

One Morning

WHILE the ambitions of Mr. Marston Pollock were expanding, his friends were multiplying and his partner, Judge Brecknell, gave him a push into politics, standing sponsor, in a way, for his success.

“I think we shall have to elect you district attorney, Pollock,” said the judge, one afternoon, tilting back in his chair and lighting a fresh cigar. “There is not so much money in it, but you young fellows should not have much; it would spoil you, yes, sir, it would spoil you completely! The thing will advertise you, Pollock—advertise you immensely! Do you all kinds of good! Then when you resume practice you will have a lot of it to do. This is going to be a very rich country. Why Pollock, my ged! sir, you have no idea what changes I have seen, and I have lived here just twenty-five years. I’m only sixty! Yes, sir, lawyers will get big fees, bigger all the time, bigger than I have ever been able to get. They used to pay me in hides and tallow, and sometimes the sun got so hot that the tallow all melted and ran away!”

Pollock rather liked the idea of being district attorney.

"Think you can elect me, judge?"

"Elect you, elect you, why, my ged! sir! of course we can, sir. Why, the idea! Why, Pollock, I know every man, woman and child in this country. No I don't, either, I forgot—I used to know them all, and how old they were, and when the babies cut teeth. But, bless me, people have come in too fast for me to keep track of 'em all. But we can do it, we can do it! And I'll just tell Sagasto what I want and he will fix all his folks. Great old fellow, that, Pollock, finest old character you ever knew. Proud, awful proud! Family thousand years old. Used to make the kings of Spain black their boots! Poor Sagasto! How his heart was set on that miserable son. It about finished the old man when the boy lost his life. The don was terribly ambitious for him. My ged! sir, how he did waste money on him!"

"Say, Pollock, I've got an idea; I have, and no mistake! Say, you've got to marry the don's niece—Constancia—the girl you met at the rancho. Capital! Why, God bless, me! sir, why did I not think of that before? Now, see here, Pollock," taking the cigar from his mouth and leaning eagerly toward the young man, "will you do it? The very thing!"

"Well, judge, isn't that just a trifle sudden? Have you an option on this young lady's heart to make over to ambitious and admiring young men at your pleasure?"

"Oh, Constancia, she'll be all right, never fear! I'll fix that!" And the judge beamed and chuckled complacently as if it were the commonest everyday matter for him to dispatch youngsters posthaste to wed pretty maidens of his acquaintance.

"Well, judge, it's very kind of you, but I believe I would prefer to undertake to do the fixing myself, when the time comes. And the time hasn't come, judge."

"Don't want to marry, eh?"

"Not now, judge. Let's get elected district attorney first, anyway; then we'll see."

Shortly after this Don Sagasto called upon the judge in much distress of mind. Two mortgages held by his son-in-law were about due, and he had been advised by Hemperton that they would not be extended. He would like to accommodate the don, but he needed considerable sums of cash for new enterprises. The situation was extremely disturbing to the don. He begged the lawyer to intercede for an extension. His wheat had been a failure for two or three years and the price was low, and he could not pay the mortgage without placing another on the remainder of his property. Affairs of the don had gone ill. He was getting old, and his griefs had broken his spirits to a great degree. His son-in-law had not of late years extended to him the consideration that the don felt he had a right to expect in view of their relationship, and in view further of the valuable property which had come to Hemperton through Felicia. "It sometimes looks as if he means to get hold of all my land," the don said to Judge Brecknell. "I am an old and a breaking man, and if I should lose my property in my old age it would finish me."

The judge promised to consult with Hemperton. He fully believed that Hemperton would not be exacting if he understood the don's situation. A year or two of good crops would replenish the old

man's treasury, and Hemperton would in the meantime surely be able to obtain all the money he needed from other sources. So he asked Hemperton to call, soon after, and acquainted him with the state of mind and finances of Sagasto. He believed he had only to present the facts and make the suggestion. Hemperton would of course be considerate with the father of his wife. But when Hemperton began to plead his own necessities for large sums to carry out considerable projects and to complain that his father-in-law was a rather improvident manager of his own property and that the rancho were better in his, Hemperton's, hands anyway, the judge was astonished. There was that in Hemperton's manner which grated disagreeably on the lawyer's sensibilities. It was apparent that Hemperton coveted the property and that he would insist upon the payment of his mortgage.

"All these old fellows have got to go," Hemperton said to the judge. "They do not understand the new order of things. Sagasto should have quit raising wheat years ago. He should have cut his rancho up into small tracts and sold them to homemakers. He could have made a great deal of money."

"Why did you not do that with the property Felicia brought?" flashed the lawyer.

"I mean to do so, but I have had enough to do with other lands, as you well know," replied Hemperton.

The lawyer urged and pled. Sagasto was old and breaking. To lose so much of his property would be a severe and an unnecessary blow. In view of Hemperton's resources he should be considerate.

"My ged! sir," broke out the lawyer, beginning to lose his temper, "this is no way for you, his rich son-in-law, to treat the don! Think what you have acquired through your relations with him. Be fair, man, be fair! He is old, you comparatively young. Give the old man time!" Hemperton was regretful but decided. He would have to insist upon the payment or he must take the property. He knew very well that the don could not pay, though he expressed to the judge great surprise that the don was straitened for cash.

The judge did not know of the change that had taken place in Hemperton's character, change that had visited itself chiefly upon the unhappy wife, change that Father Leon saw and over which the good priest grieved; so the judge did not understand that this disposition to bear down heavily upon his father-in-law, this newly developed greed—for that was what the judge termed it, greed for the land, and nothing else—was but a phase in the hardening and the spoiling of Hemperton's nature. The judge was disappointed, surprised, indignant. Before he saw Sagasto again the lawyer made another vigorous appeal to Hemperton to be lenient; but Hemperton irritably declined to extend further consideration, and rather sharply admonished the judge to drop the subject and attend to his own business.

The judge was thoroughly angry now. Hemperton had been a profitable client, and because of long association and through the close relation the lawyer had sustained to the don and on account of his admiration for Felicia as well as his hitherto great esteem for Hemperton, there had grown up naturally

a strong friendship between the men. But now the judge was angry, and he had been always a sturdy, impetuous and independent character.

"Well! damn it! Hemperton," he broke out, "if that's the way you are going to treat Sagasto after all these years I shall have to ask you to find another attorney. I don't like it, damn it! sir, I don't like it! I think it downright shabby, and I don't care to attend to your business hereafter."

Hemperton buttoned up his coat with great deliberation and declared that he saw no occasion for the judge exhibiting so much feeling over a simple matter of business, but if he chose to become personal where personalities were uncalled for that was the judge's affair.

Then the judge paced his office, red in the face, smoking furiously, and repeating to himself that he would be damned if he ever saw anything so cold-blooded as that. The loss of a good client like Hemperton was no light affair, but, "my ged! sir," he did not propose to sit by and see an exhibition of such rank ingratitude to his old friend the don, without expressing his opinion. No doubt his dismissal of Hemperton had been hasty and poor business; but never mind, he had gorged himself on satisfaction at any rate.

How could he tell Sagasto? The lawyer sat down in his big chair with a heavy bump, and stared angrily out of the window.

How could he tell the don? How could he make known to that kind and proud and failing old friend that his son-in-law declined to extend that mortgage—declined positively, and had virtually declared that he proposed to have the don's property? The

lawyer shrank from doing it, but then he had a thought. He would propose a test for Hemperton. He was convinced that Hemperton did not need the money and did not really want it, but that he did covet the land and indeed coveted all the land that Sagasto owned. It was an entirely new phase of Hemperton's character, but Hemperton's attitude and manner had in one brief moment let in a flood of light upon the workings of his mind and showed to the penetrating lawyer what the son-in-law was designing—absolute possession of the Sagasto estate.

The don could not pay the cash called for by the mortgage. The judge would suggest that Hemperton, instead of accepting the face of the instrument, make a loan upon the remainder of the property, the portion of the rancho upon which no mortgage had ever been executed.

The lawyer was now positive, with the insight the last interview had given him into the secret purpose of Hemperton, that the don's son-in-law would do it; that that would, in fact, be the very thing he was at heart desiring.

A day or so later, Don Sagasto called again. Tactfully as he could the lawyer unfolded the situation, presenting Hemperton's refusal to extend the loan on the ground of heavy demands upon his own resources as his regretful reason for being absolutely obliged to collect the loan.

The don winced, but his proud old head went up. He would ask no favors. He was manifestly much astonished and moved and hurt, but after all it was business. Yes, he knew that Mr. Hemperton was engaged in large affairs that required much money at times. Really he should not have expected his

son-in-law would be able to favor him. After all, it was as well, perhaps. The property would go to Felicia eventually, and to Constanica. The don could not pay—that was out of the question. The judge might as well make out a deed, and dispense with the formality of a foreclosure sale.

When the judge suggested the other plan, giving a mortgage on the clear property, the don reflected briefly and then assented. He would like to repay the loan, and he was not yet ready to finally part with the property. A few heavy wheat yields would enable him to pay in full. Yes, he would consent, but he thought Hemperton would not, because Hemperton wanted cash.

It was, indeed, just what the son-in-law desired, but to save appearances he at first demurred. The cash was what he needed, but perhaps he might arrange matters if that would so greatly accommodate the senor.

And thus it came about that Hemperton, son-in-law of Don Cristobal Sagasto, held a mortgage upon the last parcel and upon all the acres of the last man of that once prosperous and chivalrous family. Thus it came to pass that Wayne Hemperton, from a landless right-of-way agent for a railroad company, had in the course of some fifteen years, got on, got bravely, largely on till he was the possessor of vast tracts, with a mortgagee's grip upon the whole wide stretch of the Sagasto estate.

Neither Hemperton nor the don told Felicia of this transaction. Formerly Hemperton confided pretty much all of his business affairs to her, but of late years, along with the other changes that were entering into his relations with Felicia and filling

that proud and loving soul with grief, he ceased to communicate his affairs to her. Keenly she felt this neglect as she ached under the rest, but she asked no questions, she indulged in no reproaches. She made no complaint to her father; she let slip never a word to the old don that might even by indirection convey a suspicion of the slights she was undergoing. Wayne was a changed and still changing man. She had no means of knowing how much of the alteration was observable by men with whom he mingled. As far as she could judge his relations with that world beyond their threshold remained as they had always been. His popularity apparently had not decreased. His manner, so far as she could see, was still urbane, and his courtly, hospitable bearing toward guests no less admirable and gratifying than in the early years of their marriage.

It seemed indeed to be wholly upon herself that this grievous change had visited its consequences, and bitter though it was, nevertheless Felicia was profoundly thankful that the world neither saw nor knew. She had been proud of her big, driving, successful husband. She had rejoiced in his popularity. She was proud of him now through all her grief. She desired that the world should see no change. She could secrete her own unhappiness, and perhaps some day Wayne her lover would reappear; but she wanted no sympathy; she would have been still more cruelly tortured in pride if her husband had so altered to people about them as to excite comment and evoke pity for her.

Thus she had gone on in her brave, unflinching way, unobtrusive in her faith, practically exercising her sympathies, comforting where she could, multi-

plying her charities and her avenues of mercy, molding the mind and the character of Constancia after her own exalted ideals, loving her neglectful husband and steadfastly doing her duty.

Her husband's naturalness—come back to them during that memorable week in Catalina waters, exalting Felicia to the uttermost after the long depressing and cruel period of his increasing unnaturalness, filling her sensitive, loving, responsive nature with hope and with restored happiness—had not endured.

It was impossible that even Felicia, who tried not to see, could misunderstand—Wayne was indulging too freely in liquor. Still another grief. Liquor had not played a part heretofore, Felicia was quite certain. Wayne had never been an abstainer, but she had not known of a single instance of over-indulgence. But now!

Felicia took his hand and put the other on his shoulder and kissed him. "Wayne, dear, you are ill, you must go at once to bed. I will bring dinner to you; come dear, come to bed!"

"Madam, I am not sick and I shall not go to bed." Then seeing Constancia, "What is that Catholic brat doing here? I'm going to send you out to your uncle's. There are too many of your kind about my house!"

The brutality of it was incredible. Felicia asked with her eyes to Constancia to leave them; then she led Wayne to dinner. Felicia could not eat. While the servant was about she bravely kept her cheer. But there must come an end to all this. She could not see the way, but a way there surely was and she must find it. She must seek for the cause and

having found it she would remove it at any sacrifice. This could not go on. It meant ruin for both. She would get him to bed quickly, but tomorrow she would endeavor to know more. She would make her final appeal! Final—final! Final before what? What alternative! Could there be a final? Divorce was impossible for her. There were not only the inexorable laws of her church, but even more inexorable was her own unflinching self, her unconquerable pride, her unbendable strength to endure! She, a daughter of a Sagasto, she, with the blood of soldiers and of men and women whose pride and courage were a part of her heritage—she expose to the world her misfortune, her unhappiness, her mistake? Anything, anything but that! What, then, could be final?

Hemperton ate but sparingly and with few words, and presently went into the yard. Felicia crept wearily upstairs to Constancia. The women threw their arms around each other and silently condoled.

“Oh, Cousin Felicia, Cousin Felicia, what can be the matter with Cousin Wayne? When will he become his real self again, when will he, when will he! I am so unhappy, Cousin Felicia, and so sorry for you, and I do love both of you very dearly!”

“Yes, dear; go down now to dinner.”

“Eat! Cousin Felicia! I couldn’t swallow a mouthful. Cousin Wayne says I must go away. I love to be with Uncle Tobal, but I do not want to be sent away from you.”

“No, dear Constancia, you shall not be sent away. Your Cousin Wayne will regret tomorrow what he said today. He is quite ill tonight. Do not worry. You shall not be sent away. There, kiss me good-

night. I wish to be alone, dear, for a time, then I shall retire."

The unhappy women embraced, and Constancia withdrew. Felicia reclined there alone on Constancia's bed. "What would be final?" she continued to interrogate, but she could get no farther. She could not see beyond tomorrow. Tomorrow, like tonight, was all gloom. She did not particularly fear that Wayne would become permanently addicted to liquor. She could cope with that, she believed. But with crushing, appalling force it was being borne in upon her that for some inexplicable reason she was losing her husband's love. She arose, turned on a light, removed her bodice and stood before her mirror. She looked long into her own face. No, her beauty had not departed. It had not even begun to fade. Grief had not despoiled her features. She had borne no child. The lines of her face and figure were scarcely changed from their perfection of fifteen years ago save that she was slightly rounder. She was still girlish and beautiful.

Then she heard Constancia playing softly on the piano, and she lay down again to listen, first extinguishing the light.

Premonition of a trouble still more grave was taking possession of her. How long could she go on living thus wretchedly, brokenly, her husband neglectful and gradually becoming positively cruel in his taunts and in his waspish flings? Presently she heard him enter the front door and come slowly upstairs. Then she heard him prepare for bed. She would sleep there with Constancia tonight. She disrobed in the dark quietly that he might not hear, and got in between the cool sheets. Later

Constancia came, but they said little. Dread, dread of something she could not define had taken hold upon her heart; not fear, for she did not, could not know that; but there was more to come, there was worse to come. Far into the night she lay thus with open eyes, seeing only darkness, and with aching heart. Then long after midnight, obeying an impulse, she arose, re-entered her room and Wayne's, and quietly lay down beside her husband. He stirred a little and put one hand on her pillow. She gently placed her own soft, warm, loving hand upon Wayne's, held it there, and thus she slept.

Early morning and breakfast went by as usual. Wayne made no allusion to his beastly ways and words of the previous night, but he kissed Felicia and Constancia with his usual tenderness.

Hemperton's library and smoking room was upstairs, and to that he went soon after breakfast, saying he had papers to prepare.

Perhaps it was 9.30 o'clock when Felicia went to her room. Passing the open library door she saw Wayne standing near a window. She entered and closed the door, walked straight to him and raised on her toes to kiss him, but seeing an abstracted and an unloving expression, she withheld. "Wayne, my dear, dear husband, what is it? Oh! Wayne, what it is that has come between us? What has changed you, dear, whatever has done it? Can you not tell me now, my husband, that we may find what is amiss in our lives and go back to the dear old ways again? Wayne, dear, I am not the weeping kind, but I am too sad to weep if I could. My heart is breaking, Wayne, because you are no longer the Wayne you used to be. If I could only know, dear, what is the

cause of it all; if I could only know if the fault is with me—but I cannot see, Wayne, I do not know. I only know that you seem not to love me, my dear, as you loved me before—before you changed. Take me in your arms, my husband, here, you and I alone and tell me what it all means. Will you not, my husband?" Then she put her hands upon his shoulders and the big, lustrous, sad, yearning eyes looked for the lighting answer in his face.

"Why, Felicia, your imagination is all the trouble. Why should I not be as fond of you as ever?"

"Aye, my dear, my dear, that is what I would give all the rest of my life to know; why, why, only why?"

"I am dreadfully out of patience with your church nonsense, Felicia, but that is all. If you would stop prostrating yourself before that tawdry idol of the 'Blessed Virgin,' as you call it. It exasperates and humiliates me. But that is all!"

"No, my husband, that is not all! If that were all the way would be easy to restore to us the contentment of our youth again. But that is not all! That does not explain the rest. Why should that make trouble between us, dear Wayne? I do not obtrude it upon you! I do not ask you to worship with me. I do not preach my faith to you here in our home. I do not spend more of my time in my church or at my devotions than women in other churches spend in theirs. My church has never come between me and my husband, nor shall it. Why should you deny to me the privilege that is precious to me? A privilege that does not interfere with your comfort nor with your plans in any way, my dear. You seem, Wayne, to have gone farther

and farther away from every kind of religious anchorage; and it grieves me, but do I ever upbraid you, do I ever make you unhappy or taunt you because of what you do or what you do not believe? Why should I not be privileged to believe as I desire, since your comfort is in no wise interfered with? Why should I not worship in the faith of my fathers? Why do you deride the presence of the Virgin? Is not every association of the Mother of our Savior tender and sweet and hallowed? Should it not be as sacred to all who are Christians, whether of my faith or of others? Do I neglect our home, Wayne? Have I not devoted myself to your comfort? Have I not been wifely, faithful and loving, my dear?"

He did not answer, but gazed rather sullenly through the window.

"No, dear, that is not all. That cannot explain. I can bear your taunts about my faith though it makes me unhappy. But what is breaking my heart, Wayne, is your neglect, your indifference and the cutting things you say. You cannot deceive a loving woman's heart. I know that in the earlier years you could not have said the bitter things that you have of late. You show to me in a thousand ways a loving woman sees that something has altered your nature, that something has cooled your love for me. Wayne, dear Wayne! do not, oh! my dear, let us not grow apart! Come back to me, my husband! Open your heart to me and tell me what it all means! If I am the cause I do not know it, and I ask you to speak. If you have anything to tell about yourself, Wayne, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that I would not forgive. I love you, my husband! I

love you! and I plead for your confidence and for the love of the happy years of our youth."

Felicia's face was close there before him, and her hands remained on his shoulders while she spoke. There were no tears in her clear, loyal eyes, but there was a love and a softness and a yearning in them that smote the very heart of the man and sent a momentary surge of contrition across his conscience. Deep down in the very depths of him he knew he had been a beast; deep down he knew this peerless, patient, loving woman was being crucified by his peevishness, his sarcasm, his neglect. He knew that every word of her appeal was well spoken and that he had absolutely no defense. He knew that there was a fatal twist in his nature that wormed itself through to the surface and had modified his life and character, and that the consequences were visited far more upon Felicia than upon himself, thus far. He knew that a dark, sinister devil of a something had interwoven itself into his very being, and that it possessed him, that it was distorting him and paralyzing his very will. He was sorry, that hour, as this beautiful wife of his was looking into his eyes and trying to penetrate into and win back his soul, he was untellably sorry for her. Could he have undone it all, just then and there, when the force of that loving appeal was full upon him, when the great love that shone through the eyes of Felicia probed to his depths and touched the old self in him that had expired long, oh! so long ago, he would have done it! He would have given back to her her girlhood, her happy young wifehood, and he would have saved her what she had suffered through him, what she yet might have to suffer through him, if he

could. Why did he not tell her then and there, and rectify it in so far as he might have done? For one brief, hurrying moment, the deep down best in the man struggled feebly through the labyrinth of the innate selfishness of him and pled for release! For a moment, a brief, precious, possible lapse of time that would even then have well sufficed as he looked into that pale, exalted face upturned and searching for the secret of the mystery of this worser self of him, he almost broke the thralldom of that worser self, he almost burst the paralyzing force that was irresistibly undoing him and her. Almost, but not quite enough, he strove to save them. And he believed that he loved her then as he had never loved before. The worth, the superlative worth of this unselfish soul, illuminating his whole selfish past in one transcendent flash, revealed his own unworth to be companion to so white a life as hers. Yes, he would have given her back her girlhood and her love and her young womanhood, if he could. He would have canceled the future if he could in that brief and accusing hour when Felicia struggled for her expiring joy. He put his arms around her and drew her to him and kissed her, and said it had been a terrible mistake and he would begin all over again. But the ring of it was not true, and Felicia knew that she had been defeated.

Then they went downstairs together and into the living room. Father Leon was there, and Constancia. The priest had come to ask Felicia's attention for one of the cases he made it a part of his duty to hunt out. He and Constancia had chatted, as he waited for Felicia.

The priest could not know that his coming was

particularly and fatally inopportune. He could not know anything of what had transpired between that unhappy pair just before. He could not know how the soul of the man and of the woman had been wrung, how the man had fought for but one brief moment for the strength to save himself and her, nor how the woman had struggled for her perishing happiness.

Then a fearful thing took place. The sight of the priest, though he had been this wretched man's most intimate companion for a long and pleasurable period, inflamed all the baser side where lodged the passions that consume, and drew the fury of a mind diseased by years of brooding on an evil thing.

"There, madam, there's the cause, since you must know, of your misfortunes and of mine!" exclaimed Hemperton, his face glowering with unnatural passion, his eyes glittering with hate, his right arm extended toward the astounded priest and his finger leveled and shaking with rage.

Before any one of the stricken group could move or speak, Hemperton seized his wife by the wrist and moved her by sheer force toward Father Leon.

"There, madam, I tell you, is the cause! There! There! Do you not see! That damned, simpering, canting priest! Go to him, madam, go to him and be comforted, since you think you are no longer welcome in my arms! This priest who has been your consoler in the past, let him comfort you now and henceforth if he can!"

Astonishment for the minute palsied her will and power of speech, but Felicia recovered from the shock before the priest. First horror, then a mighty wrath arose.

"Wayne! stop! before you say too much!"

Amazement muffled her voice, but not the force of the terrible warning in her emotion, warning that her husband's blinding fury failed to see. Felicia wrenched to throw his hand from its grip upon her wrist, but the strength of his fingers was too great.

"The end has come, madam, to the cunning game of your secret love, you and this miscalled vicar of God! You have wondered why I have stung your heart, madam, but now you know that I have known the truth but would not strike for my very love of you and him. It was not your love I stung, madam, but your conscience! Your appeal to me just now to be my other self was well attuned, madam, and almost made me think I might forgive this thing!"

"Forgive! stop, I say again," exclaimed Felicia, "the limit is almost reached!"

"I will not stop, madam, till you and this smirking fellow of the cross and the cassock shall understand that I have penetrated all the sly and crafty tricks that unholy love like yours must use to close the eyes you well might dread to meet!"

Both the priest and Felicia had repeatedly raised their hands and begun to speak to stay this flow of passion, folly and reproach; but the frantic man's torrential force poured out and on and would not be opposed.

"I see, madam, that you, and you, vicar of hell and not of heaven, would tell me that the thing I have seen I have never seen at all! You would tell me that you have never used your faith to shut my eyes, nor your church as an assignation! you would even now here—here when I have you face to face and have confounded you with the knowledge you thought

your adroitness and your so-called devoutness had made impossible, you—you, madam, and you, you somber hypocrite, affront the confidence you have thus abused by protestations that would protest in vain to me. But it is the end, madam, for you, and for you, priest; the end of your sacrilegious humbuggery and the end of the deception that you thought to practice on me hereafter as you believed you had in the past! Madam, look at him, look at him!" holding Felicia's right wrist with his steely left, and shaking his finger at the big, pale priest, "look at your priestly lover!"

Then a flash of the woman's withering, righteous anger struck from Felicia's blazing eyes as she tore her wrist away and threw up her head defiant and scornful as Calpurnia might, checking her husband's insane words for a moment.

"Stop, I command you, stop!" and her voice was unmuffled now as the voice of Joan before the walls of Paris. "It is indeed the end for you and me, Wayne Hemperton. I will not even deny this that you have said. I am too long a faithful wife, and I have borne too much to bear the ignominy of refuting this figment of a jealous, causeless rage. The women of my house have not been humble, weeping souls to pour their bleeding hearts out through their eyes! The women of my house have loved with all the ardor of our Castile blood, even as I loved you, Wayne Hemperton; but their loves were chaste even in the courts and palaces of Spain, and my wifehood shall have no defense but the honor of the Sagasto women." Her regal head held firm and high, the pallor of her indignation accentuating the nobility of her features and the satiny blackness of

her hair, her fearless, unwavering eyes streaming the scorn that gushed from the undefiled fountains of her soul, there was that in her regnant mien, disdaining defense, scorning explanation or appeal, that would have driven its own swift exoneration into a mind less tortured and diseased than Hemperton's. But her imperious indignation, her lofty disdain of an indictment so false, so utterly uncomporting with the fibre of her mind and her pride of name, but dimly penetrated the gloomy and inflamed recesses of his comprehension, and left no imprint save to lash his insensate fury to excesses still more extreme.

"You cannot, therefore, dare not, madam, deny you love this priest!" he cried again, more insensible than ever to reason and more lost in rage and desperation. "You shall confess it here now, madam, and end this double-dealing once for all!" Then he grasped her wrist again but she tore away; and the priest, livid, unutterably mournful, pitying, wondering, too mournful for them both to be wrathful, yet mournful and wondering why this inexplicable tragedy had come to pass, instinctively comprehending up to this point that his hour to speak out the heart of him had struck, moved to interpose, but Hemperton, in a final transport, seized a sharp and shining bit of steel, a Moorish dagger that hung among a bunch of curios on the wall, and swiftly stepped toward Felicia with the blade upraised.

Swifter still the priest seized Hemperton's arm with one hand, and with the other clutched the hand that held the weapon. Hemperton was powerful but Father Leon more powerful still, and the gleaming bauble dropped at Felicia's feet.

Then the priest took the cross from its depending

chain upon his bosom and held it high aloft between Hemperton and Felicia, and spake:

"Let there be peace! dear old friends, in this sad misunderstanding! Let there be peace, I beseech you, that we may endeavor to understand!"

Hemperton, still blindly furious and unheeding, snatched the cross from Father Leon and flung it in his palid face.

"Damn your cross!" he shouted, "and damn your priestly robes and you! Confess to me now, confessor of women and girls and mindless men, confess to me! Tell me, impostor priest, that you are the clandestine lover of my wife, and tell me that your confessional is a fraud and a means of unholy communication, your joint schemes of succoring imaginary distress only a means to hoodwink me. Tell me, confess to me here and now, that you are the lover of my wife! Hypocrite and pretender that you are!"

Then there took place that which enveloped Constancia, unhappy and distracted spectator of this harrowing scene, in final and wondering awe that in all the years to come she never quite shook off. She saw a levitation almost unearthly light up the white countenance of Father Leon; and she saw his great figure tower still loftier under the flood of exalted emotion that suffused his frame from crown to toe. She saw—and never in the years to come did she cease to remember it—she saw Father Leon, still between Felicia and her husband, raise his right hand straight over his head and with his left clutch Hemperton by the lapel of his coat.

"Yes," he exclaimed, his face growing paler still as a wave of composite sternness, tenderness, exaltation and fearlessness suffused his features, "Yes, I

say to you, Wayne Hemperton, I am the adorer of Senora Hemperton, and I have been since years before you came with your retinue of sorrows for her, and I shall be her faithful and unspeaking adorer through all the solitary years of my life; but not the kind your baseless jealousy has conceived. I am not the Senora's lover, but her adorer, I, adoring and understanding her surpassing worth as you have never done and as you are utterly unable to understand! High as the stars are exalted above this planet, Wayne Hemperton, so far exalted is the Senora above your unworthy self. I am her adorer, but she hears it now for the first and only time in all her life or mine. I am her adorer, but not her lover; for my adoration is sinless, unvoiced and consecrated and would have remained unvoiced till the end, Wayne Hemperton, had not your unreasoning and unprovoked outburst wrought the irreparable havoc of this hour! I say to you, here and now, and I say it with all the solemnity of my priestly office, that your folly is supreme and without a cause, and that what you have done is unforgivable! Look upon her, unworthy man, look upon her and then go abashed and forever contrite from a divinity such as hers, and smite your repentant breast in anguish for what you have lost this hour! Hear me you will, once and forever, and you will understand it and believe if I must crush the God's truth of it into you with these two hands, Wayne Hemperton," and the priest seized Hemperton's arms in both strong hands and shook him, weakened and almost undone by the paroxysm of his insensate and jealous rage. "All through the years I have been your loyal and steadfast friend. Never till this mournful

hour had there been revealed to me the cause of the unaccountable alteration that has been working the ruin of you. Your wife and I have never once in all the period of your mysterious and inexplicable conduct interchanged a single word about what you and she have been undergoing. I perceived, and no doubt has she, and deplored, but hopelessly, the unaccountable transformation in your nature. I could only assume that your disbelief in the faith we both profess started the unhappy alteration that has wrought this wreckage of your lives."

The priest was still holding Hemperton's arm in his powerful grasp, looking him full in the face and speaking with tremendous earnestness and force. "This white-souled wife of yours being absolutely without guile, having not the shadow of a suspicion of how I had adored her since her girlhood, could not possibly ascribe any part of the change in your nature to the jealousy that you have today exposed for the first time, and so fatally to yourself and to her. I know not what scandal-mongering tongue, if any, has played its wretched part in this undoing; but the man does not live, Wayne Hemperton, who had less cause to distrust his wife or to eat his heart out in jealous brooding than you. I have adored the Senora but not as a lover, because I am a man none the less for being a priest; but years ago the priest became master, and she has never known, neither by word nor intimation. I may say this now, inasmuch as your wife has loved you steadfastly, Wayne Hemperton, and will to the end of her life, though you have absolved her from every claim of wifeness by this unpardonable hour. I am a priest, Wayne Hemperton, but I am also a man! And I say to you now,

molest that woman not at all hereafter. She shall dwell in peace. Do you understand, in peace! I shall be in this house no more, but I shall know. There must be peace for her, Wayne Hemperton, or I may yet forget that I am a priest as I have tried to forget, gazing on that fleshless, gaping thing on my study table, that I am a man!"

The force and overwhelming convincing solemnity of the priest were indescribable but unmistakable. None but a mind obsessed and morbid could fail to understand or remain unaffected by the simplicity and power of his conclusion, his solemn words, the resonant voice vibrating with emotion, his sorrow for the dissolution and the needless, causeless loss of this partnership of sympathy, interest and friendship. All this, together with a final revelation of the superb self-mastery of the priest, his transcendent self-denial bore in upon Hemperton's tormented soul and let in the cooling waters of reason upon the consuming fires of his paroxysmal fury.

Gradually overcome by the irresistible force and masterful spirit of Father Leon, Hemperton had slowly bended his head; and, at the end when the priest let go his arms and strode toward a window, Hemperton slowly turned away and without daring to lift his eyes to Felicia took his hat and went from the house.

CHAPTER XVIII

Who Knows, My Dears?

NOT until long after the last of the stately dons of the house of Sagasto had passed to a celestial Andalusia did the energizing force of the men who came out of the east to build a city in the far southwest reach covetously for the slopes and fertile fields of the upper San Fernando. A city was swiftly building upon the hills from whose tops inspired padres had gazed away across a treeless plain to a shipless sea; a city was building over there beyond the dun backbone that stopped the valley's sweep, and south and west and east a thrifty folk were occupying those sunny lands of the dons and obliterating ancient landmarks from the face of things, but the serene domain of Don Sagasto slept serenely on. The don himself was changing and aging with his years and his griefs, retreating as it were before the spirit of the new regime which he neither understood nor welcomed; but while the great ranchos that had belonged to his brother dons were passing into new and more enterprising ownership, the Sagasto acres remained untouched and continued to yield their wheat and fatten their sheep and ripen their olives. For the greater part the don dwelt alone, except that he retained a loyal group of vaqueros and plowmen and

harvesters and vintagers, and tenders of his sheep. In early days the don's retinue had been almost regimental; and now in his old age, reduced though his resources were, he would not dismiss a round dozen dependent old men and women, notwithstanding their superannuation, because of their long service. Hemperton would have bade them begone, but not the don. He permitted them to stay on, idling in the sun for the most part, year in and year out, putting forth a pitiful show of industry to deceive the eye of the master. The few survivors of his race and class still came, many times, to hunt and to talk of bygone-days, and to drink his wines and to smoke their little brown cigarettes on the hospitable veranda. But more and more the don lived to himself, and retired in spirit and feeling further and further before the new order that had not yet encroached upon his domain, but which he felt to be closing in around and crushing out the only ways he knew and loved. Castilian ways and Castilian days transplanted for a time to the dreamy valleys and the leafless hills of this far New Spain were swiftly passing forever before the onset of the American and his noisy locomotives and his driving brain. The fandango had been danced for the last time; the tinkle of the guitar was heard no more under the vine and the fig and the pepper bough; the black-eyed senoritas and the young gallants who talked of love on moonlit nights while the dons discussed their flocks and wines had departed from their haciendas and were fast being assimilated into the life of the new people.

Felicia and Constancia had joined the don at San Fernando after that luctiferous hour. Felicia hung-

ered for the solitude of the great, cool, adobe quadrangle and the peace of the twilight, the ineffable glory of the sunsets, the wide freedom and solace of the mountains. She wanted rest. She needed time to think. She yearned for the tranquility of the dreamy rancho to recompose her nerves and clear her brain. The "Final" had come—now what? She did not propose to leave her husband. She resolved that not a single eye should perceive from her manner that trouble had come into her life. She had no fear of Wayne, and she would go resolutely on, as she always had, bearing her part as a wife before the world to the end. But she must have time just now to think it out. She must take invoice of her resources of strength before resuming the life that must henceforth be but a duty and a concealment. Least of all would she tell the don what had taken place. Her pride she could not and would not humble thus to let even him know that she had been so stricken. She raised a calm if not smiling face to the old man's anxious one and kissed him as she had in her joyous girlhood. She bade him ride with her and with Constancia. She caressed the hounds, successors of the pack that had sniffed indifferently at the legs of Hemperton that first day long ago. She presided at the table without a trace of a sore-hit heart. She flew no signals of distress, this daughter of a don of brave Castilian blood, and Constancia flung her arms about Felicia's neck and kissed her in sheer wonder at her fortitude, calling her "brave, brave dear," wondering and never ceasing to wonder at that unbroken self-control.

"I'm going to send for Pollock and the judge,

Felicia," observed the don. Felicia had said that Wayne would not be able to come, she knew, as his engagements would be pressing for some time. She would be glad to see the judge and Mr. Pollock. Constancia thought it would be "delightful," and blushed just the faintest, loveliest rose-pink of a blush that ever tinted the soft white cheek of a niece of a fine old don.

Young Major Frawley and young Lieutenant Thornton had paid their respects to the pretty niece, many times indeed, at the house in town. They had come alone and they had come the pair and they had vowed and vowed again that they would never be content until Constancia, and of course her cousin, and a proper number of others as well, had consented to a cruise at sea, the longer the better, as the very particular guests of these fine young men of arms.

The chronicler of this truthful tale cannot be altogether sure, because how could he possibly always know what gentle thoughts tint a maiden's face; but truly he believes that although this pretty niece—of whom her uncle was so proud, and whom Felicia had bred to be so womanly and whom nature made so altogether lovable and so good to see—thought young Major Frawley and young Lieutenant Thornton, fine young gentlemen indeed and quite equal to the command of any thousands of soldiers and the winning of any number of mighty battles, yet neither had ever caused a tint so perfectly bewitching upon that soft and olive cheek! And the rosy tint came once again when Mr. Marston Pollock bowed low over the plump little hand put out to the new district attorney. And Mr. Marston

Pollock wished that he were privileged, like the judge, to raise the little hand to his lips and the hand of the Senora Felicia, too.

"We hear that you made many fine speeches, Mr. Pollock," said Constancia, "and that great things are expected of you. I'm sure we are very glad, and we hope you will become a famous man some day."

Young Mr. Pollock wanted to take the dear little hand again, and say how much obliged he was for so many good wishes, and that he was particularly grateful for the good wishes of this particular pretty niece of the don, but the things he wanted most to say he could not say or did not say, but only declared they were all very kind and that he was under the profoundest obligations to Don Sagasto for helping to make friends for him among the Spanish voters and he hoped to be able to prove his gratitude, simple and frankly, as became a young man of parts and feeling.

Then somehow it seemed to be the most natural thing in the world that the don and the judge should go away to their own devices and themes of dogs and guns and stories and old cronyisms, and that Felicia should have to be occupied in her own apartments and that young Mr. Marston Pollock, district attorney-elect, and the pretty niece of the fine old don should somehow be left to themselves.

It was the most natural thing in the world that the district attorney-elect should fall to telling Constancia about his campaign, and how he had ridden all over the country, meeting hundreds and hundreds of people and how the judge had seemed to know everybody and had literally commanded

everybody to vote for him and how everybody seemed to think that what the judge said to do must surely be done, of course, and how the judge could tell the funniest stories; and how he called all the men by their given names, and how every ranchero insisted that the judge and himself take dinner, and how the judge would trundle the youngsters on his knee, and what incomprehensible quantities of candy and sweet things the judge was forever discovering in most unexpected pockets and places and with what manners of a cavalier the judge took off his hat to all the women, and how they all smiled on the judge, and how they all declared their men-folks would vote for the judge's friend or there would straightway be a world of family discord; and how the judge was altogether the most lovable and gracious and the kindest and the most indefatigable old fellow and loyal friend any young man ever had.

It was the most natural thing in the world, of course, that the young man should warm up in the telling and that his eager face should glow with interest and feeling and gratification, and that he should say again with deep, quiet earnestness how grateful he was to her uncle, for having made the way so easy for him with the Spanish people. And who shall say it was not the most natural thing in the world that Constanca thought not all the votes for Mr. Marston Pollock had been earned by the judge's great good nature and by his sweets and his fine ways with the women, but as many or more by the big manly voice and the straight look out of the eyes and the ready tongue of the judge's young partner and favorite, and she was now quite sure that so fine an eye and so entertaining a talker she

had not met among all the eyes that had paid their admiring tribute to the old don's neice; nor among the men who had made pretty speeches to her under the big trees in her cousin's garden and in the cosy corners of her cousin's house—under those trees and in those corners that somehow seem to be designed for no purpose on earth so much as to make it easy for young men to say and for pretty nieces to hear the gallant and the sweet and the kindly somethings and the tender nothings that men have loved to say and maidens to hear since this fine old world began.

However do you suppose it happened that Constancia found herself thrumming a guitar, by and by, and singing a song that Felicia sang in her own girlhood and taught to her father's niece? And however did it happen that young Mr. Marston Pollock, sitting there, fell quite so completely under the spell of the maiden's voice and the words of the Spanish love song that his eyes grew soft and his manly heart grew tender, and he thought the maid the fairest of all that he had seen?

Then by and by again, when dinner was done and the judge and the don must have their smoke and their stories on the veranda, would you have thought it not altogether the way that men and maidens have if the man and the maid strolled down the pepper-lane and talked the talk of youth, and thought the thoughts of youth, and hoped the hopes of youth and were altogether surprised that time should fly and that night should come so quickly?

"Cousin Felicia! why, we have left her all alone!" thought Constancia self-accusingly. However could she have been so forgetful of that aching heart bearing its hurts so bravely alone! Felicia who

mothered her and who loved her and whose heart had suffered so. Didn't Mr. Pollock think they would better find Cousin Felicia and sit with her and Uncle Tobal and the judge? She was sure Cousin Felicia must be lonesome.

"Why, of course," said Mr. Marston Pollock, "by all means let us find your cousin," and the clever young hypocrite really didn't mean a single word of it. And more, how could he, how could he be expected to think whether the cousin of a fine old don's pretty niece were lonesome or not, when the niece herself walked contentedly at his side and when he could look unrebuked right down into her luminous eyes, and sometimes, quite by accident of course, touch his hand against her hand and feel its warmth of youth go tingling through and through him! How could he indeed?

And so there was another famous quail hunt the next day, and young Mr. Pollock's hand was hurt by his gun's recoil; and the don's pretty niece was sure it was a dreadful wound—much worse, indeed much worse than Mr. Marston Pollock made out—and she must bind it carefully with a balm that Tizza always used for hurts and bruises.

And there were more songs to sing and more rides to be taken and more roses to be plucked as the sun went low and the rose-light of its setting filled the sky and the face of the maid, as the same rosy light had fallen on the face of Felicia when Wayne stood there in her beauteous, trusting, wholesome girlhood.

And we may not doubt, do you think, that sweet and tender things were said but were never intended for others than they who spoke and heard? And, ah! who knows my dears but the mocking bird that

poured the song of his joyful heart out into the soft night air from the top of an ancient sycamore near that veranda was only telling to his mate listening in the moonlight the same dear tale that the young man told with his eyes even if his lips did not? Who knows, my dears, who knows?

From the corner of his eye the wise old judge saw goings-on that pleased him mightily, but he said never a word. Not he! Too wise he was to flush the birds so early in their mating!

So the San Fernando days were all too brief for young Pollock and for the judge as well, who said his old-fashioned goodby with his cavalier's grace, and then trundled his gun and his beaming old face and his heart of youth back to business.

As for Mr. Marston Pollock, district attorney-elect, he liked not to have said goodby at all. Barely had he started when he remembered something that he really must go within to find, and thus he was of course obliged to say goodby all over again and to shake hands, particularly with the pretty niece, who hoped he had now found everything and who fibbed shockingly when she said it.

But adieus were really said at last, and the judge and the judge's young man were off down the pepper lane, and Constancia and Felicia and the don watched them till they were lost behind the hill near the mission church.

Felicia, wise, dear heart, having seen, put her arm around Constancia and kissed her as she would a daughter wooed and—thinking! Thus had her lover come and thus had won her heart, here under the same old peppers and among the roses, and on the vined veranda, and cantering over the San Fernando

slopes and in the picturesque vicinage of the mission. The mission, where she had said her "aves" and lorded it over Father Leon, was slowly crumbling away. The priest who followed Father Leon was a man of lesser mind and she had seen little of him. The mission parish had dwindled, Indians died and the Mexicans dispersed to find work in the growing pueblo.

So many days Felicia stayed that the senor wondered, but he asked no questions, nor did Constancia volunteer the story of that black day. Felicia had exacted no promise, but had quietly said on the way: "Please, Constancia, say nothing to father," and that was enough.

But the time was at hand Felicia knew when she must return, or tell it all. Her resolution had not changed, but the tranquility of her father's house and the sunny old rancho had fortified her spirit and enabled her to take a firmer grip upon her courage and her self-control. She did not apprehend further outbursts such as that last, but she settled herself to endure what the moods of her husband might impose. She rather expected Wayne would be contrite for awhile, but that offense of his had struck too deep for her to think of easy forgiveness should his probable reaction move him to plead. No, it was the end! The long probation without which she could not trust again, would never be gone through with by him, she was confident. He was now utterly another Wayne, and that monstrous charge he had made was indeed beyond forgiving without far more indisputable evidence of contrition than her intuition told her was probable with him. The happiness and the love of their lives had been

lived, and there now remained of it only ashes. She would go on with what her wife's station required and no one should be the wiser, through her. She hoped Wayne would assert equal self-mastery.

And thus, her resolution formed, she and Constan-
cia returned to the town house, and left the don wondering and well deceived, but ever anxious.

The Hemperton servants had heard nothing of that paroxysm of her husband's. They had wondered at Felicia's unusual absence, but the routine of life was taken up on her return where it had been left off. Wayne came home as usual, entirely civil, made no allusions, and indeed was neither contrite in manner nor indicated that there had been that for which he should be. Daily life went on about as it had before. Neighbors came and went, and guests sat at their table, and never a one suspected the tragedy of Hemperton and Felicia.

CHAPTER XIX

As a Daughter of Castile Should

THUS more months passed. Another royal pageant cleft that Christmas sky, the splendor of a Southern California Christmas sun again peering over the crown of San Jacinto and into the living green of the broad valley, ascending and reigning in golden majesty across the Christmas heavens, flinging the folds of his imperial robes of gold and purple like imperial largesses across the shoulders of his subject mountains and laying him down at night in his royal couch of gold and carmines and blues behind the purple curtain that Cataline raised before an adoring world.

The day had been filled hitherto with the tenderest associations for Felicia. Even today she refused to accept from the past less joy. Felicia's was not a repining nature. She lived her days to the very brim. If yesterday had been glorious sunshine it was no less glorious to recall because of a storm today. Hers was too healthy a mind and body to become morose, even if into the fountain of her happiness had been poured the salt and gall of sorrow and disappointment. The dear chapter of love in her book of life might be finished, perhaps never to be reopened, but other chapters remained to be read, and Felicia shrank not from the reading.

The old life had been resumed, so far as appearances were concerned, but resumed for appearances only. They were husband and wife no more, save to their guests and their servants, and to preserve the harmonious routine of daily life.

Wayne and Felicia had consented to join a yachting party for this Christmas day, as guests not of the lieutenant and the major but of other friends who enjoyed the sport.

It had been planned to spend the day cruising off the harbor of San Pedro, and to return to the Hemperton home for an informal Christmas party that night.

For a week or more Wayne had conducted himself in a fairly unobjectionable manner. His attitude toward his wife was considerate and almost devoted. He had insisted upon her reading to him in the evenings. After that unforgivable indictment he had brought against her they had occupied separate apartments, an arrangement to which her husband had made no protest, seeming to accept everything after that day as a matter of course. Usually Felicia retired first, and offered her cheek for his nightly kiss. Once, within a few days of Christmas, he had made as if to gather her closely in his arms as she turned her cheek, but she drew away. His head went down and he said only "Good night, Felicia" more tenderly than usual. Felicia supposed he had softened a little under the approach of their wedding anniversary, and she even dared to hope, barely, that the brooding which had so distorted his once affectionate and normal self might even yet pass away. But barely, only. She had hoped too many times before, only to be precipitated back into

a still deeper and more poignant disappointment. Therefore, she had long ago ceased to hope strongly. She merely accepted, enduring, and thankful it was no worse.

The day before Christmas Wayne surprised her. "Felicia, let us excuse ourselves from the yachting party and remain at home together, tomorrow."

They had arisen from the breakfast table and Wayne put his arm about her shoulder quite in his old lover-like fashion, and thus had asked her.

It pleased her. It pleased Constancia also.

"Yes, do, Cousin Felicia," she urged eagerly, catching at every possible circumstance upon which might sometime yet be built a reconstruction of their shattered happiness.

"Yes, do stay, Felicia; I would love to have you with us, dear, both of you, but I think it would be delightful for you and Cousin Wayne to have the day to yourselves. If it were my wedding anniversary nobody could induce me to attend any kind of a party. I think it would be perfectly lovely to spend the day alone together—just you two!"

Constancia had of course undergone a profound shock on the occasion of her Cousin Wayne's outburst, and had never ceased to hope that he would eventually recover his equilibrium, that he would in time become contrite, that Felicia would forgive, and that the course of their lives would flow on as before. But she dared not talk to Felicia about it. Not that she was afraid of her cousin, but she well knew her sensitiveness and her inflexible pride. She knew that Felicia would decline to admit even her into the innermost closet of her thought and life.

"Will you stay, Felicia?" Wayne asked again, as his wife had not promptly replied.

"Yes, Wayne, I will stay, if you wish."

In spite of the unforgettable shock her love had sustained she was pleased and almost dared to be happy that Wayne should thus seem to seek her again.

"It will disappoint the others, but I think it will be lovely for you to spend the day that way. Then at night all of us will return to have a jolly time," said Constancia.

So it was decided. Wayne said he would send regrets. He and Felicia would perhaps remain at home during the forenoon, and drive after lunch. At all events the day would be theirs, in their own way.

The chief change that was observable in the Hemperton routine of daily life was the non-appearance of Father Leon. Felicia, wholly innocent and disdaining defense as she had and would thereafter, would never have consented to justify her husband's baseless charge by requesting that Father Leon come no more. She would express no opinion: If she had been asked she would have said come as before. She proposed that her life go on as usual, and she would not be a party to the absence of their privileged but unpresuming friend.

But the priest did not ask. He simply did not come. He grieved deeply, and he had not been able to fight off the conviction that Hemperton's mind had been preyed upon by some other disease or passion than that of jealousy of himself. That was too foundationless, too absonant. There was a somber and unexplained mystery somewhere.

The real cause of his friend's metamorphosis of nature had never been accounted for, and might never be. Their friendship had been completely shattered, and relations between Hemperton, Felicia and himself had been altered—for all time, the priest now feared—and all by some unknown influence traceable, up to the present time, to nothing but a religious difference between Hemperton and his wife, a religious difference from which had sprouted the seeds of jealousy and their fruitage in a direful form. But there must be another cause, the priest reasoned. There must be a cause back of the apparent cause. In the penetralia of Hemperton's mind—naturally strong, logical and well-balanced—there must have lodged somewhere a mental bacillus that had multiplied to the undoing of them all. It might be a bacillus of disease, a seed of insanity or a canker of remorse. Remorse for what? Aye, remorse for what? Father Leon did not so conclude, but his was too logical, too active and too lucid and penetrating a mind not to reason thus on possibilities. At all events one dear association had been disrupted perhaps forever by the extraordinary and inadequately explained operation of Hemperton's mind. The priest could not yet see his way to rearrange his association with them for the future. That would have to work itself out. The prospect was mournful and unpromising. For the present he could only wait—and hope.

Notwithstanding the revelation of his consecrated secret he could have continued to visit at the Hemperton home with no violence to his conscience and without disloyalty to their friendship. This adoration was no longer the passionate attachment of his

youth, but the tranquil and disincorporated ideality of his mastered manhood. Once it had been an ardent, almost consuming distraction that came near to sweeping him from the foundations of his priesthood and his very life itself; but the adoration of his middle manhood was a sublimated something with all the dross of selfishness refined away. In the long processes that led to his self-mastery he had, as it were, encysted and insulated his love in a kind of non-conducting, unimpassioned impersonality. He had disembodied his love, idealized and super-subtilized it, until it had become a possession far more precious than the passionate devotion which had come so near to his priestly undoing in those San Fernando days. Then it had been the healthy, normal man profoundly loving the young and exceedingly attractive girl. The old mission days were the one real battle-ground of his soul—after that conquest the rest had been easy. The conflict there, amid surroundings that were highly romantic and which appealed to his poetic and idealist temperament, had been heroic and devastating, but final and conclusive. His prostrations before the statue of the crucified Savior, his supplications under the twinkling stars, had brought their answer, and afterward the man-love in him had seemed to perish as by a kind of creeping paralysis that left his other self a thing benumbed and dwelling wholly in spirituality. The priest had sprung from a race of strong and tempestuous natures, and the elemental man in him had torn great gaps in the texture of his resolves, but the priest had hugged the skull to his breast and kissed its yawning jaws and invoked the full force of his great awe of Rome,

and thus at last he had emerged from the conflict, fortified and serenely confident for the rest of his life. The mighty combat had ended years ago. It was not so much Felicia that he loved thereafter as the spiritual essence of his adoration, a disincorporate something, a kind of incarnation that it satisfied him to love instead of the woman herself. And so he had come and gone all the years since, without in the least doing violence to his own self-respect, with no hurt at all to the privileges of his friendship. But he had appeared among the Hempertons no more after that morning.

Don Sagasto and Constancia left directly on the yacht at San Pedro. The don kissed Felicia with even more than his usual tenderness. He took her face between his hands and looked anxiously into her eyes, as if to read the mystery that he strangely felt but dared not touch upon. Was this dear daughter of his—the child of the lost love of his youth—was she happy or was she not? Her eyes told nothing. He kissed them, and the lips. He remembered, afterward, how bravely she met his eye, how she held to his old arm, how she stood there in the doorway watching him depart, how she said goodby, almost sadly it seemed to him afterward when it was all over and only himself and his niece remained.

During the morning Wayne and Felicia strolled among the trees that surrounded their home. Since that night when the frantic comrade of her girlhood, Ramon Modeno, had borne himself so unlike a man Felicia had avoided that umbrageous corner. Today Wayne walked that way. The Christmas sun was already warm, and the day bade as fair as the same

day sixteen years before when Felicia stood under the silken canopy in the patio and joined her life with Wayne's.

"I hear that Father Leon is soon to be made a bishop," said Wayne.

This first allusion made by him to the priest since that day startled Felicia and made her vaguely uneasy. Was it portentous? This husband of hers had done sorry things to their lives under that inscrutable influence, whatever it was; was there more to come of this sinister presence today!

Felicia did not reply.

"Has he not told you?" Wayne asked, not looking at her, but at one of the dogs at their feet; still there was no jarring note in his voice.

"No, Wayne, I have not spoken with Father Leon for some time. He said nothing then."

"Felicia, I fear I have not made you very happy."

"You made me very happy, Wayne, till some strange influence got your old self in its power. Since then—I have not been happy, Wayne."

Perhaps the inspiration of their anniversary—the influence of the association of their minds going back to that other Christmas day—was upon him and coming into play upon the better nature of the man.

"I wish I might undo it all, Felicia, but it is too late, I suppose."

"It is not too late, my dear, for us to be as happy as we were. The change, Wayne, is all in you."

"Still, Felicia, I would be glad indeed if I could undo it all."

"Do not dwell on what is past, dear; but if you can ever again be the Wayne you were, be it, Wayne,

be it! That is all I can ask or hope, now. I do not know what has come between us. You do not choose to tell me, and probably I shall never know. I only know, Wayne, that you are utterly changed. From you I do not conceal that it has made me unhappy. But today—Wayne, let us forget it all. Let us at least be as happy as we may in the day itself and in our memory of what our first Christmas was to both of us. Perhaps, dear, I expected too much. Perhaps I had no right to expect you to continue for a life-time to be the Wayne of my girlhood. Perhaps it is the way of men. But it is not the way of women, my dear.”

She could not bring herself to speak further of the cleavage that he had opened between them, though the thought of it was uppermost in her mind and weighed the heaviest of all upon her heart.

The unaccountable silence that always possessed him whenever Felicia intimated that he was withholding from her a confidence that might help to dissolve this mystery, help to remove the impediment to their happiness, seized him again and he responded not at all to the infinite tenderness of her appeal. But presently he left the theme, and said that after lunch they would drive.

The morning passed, and the royal pageant of the Christmas sun made its royal progress across the zenith of the Christmas sky.

After lunch the carriage was brought and Wayne and Felicia drove till three. As the afternoon wore on an unfamiliar calm stole over Felicia. Slowly there came upon her a kind of solemn intuition that somehow the period of her unhappiness was drawing to an end, and that Wayne her lover would be

restored to her. Involuntarily she drew closer to him as they approached home. They passed the church where Father Leon officiated and they saw him emerge. He raised his hat and bowed low. Felicia perceived that her husband, though evidently observing the priest, did not respond to his salutation, but that his face grew very dark and stern, and that some of the evil, vengeful look that had distorted it on that dreadful morning swept swiftly over it and settled there.

Hemperton whipped the horses, and all too quickly Felicia was again at her door. Too quickly, for she had enjoyed the drive. Her husband's mood had been on the whole agreeable and the supreme glory of that Christmas sun and softness and peace with the mountains empurpled in cloakings of imperial colors, and all growing things a blending of vivid, vitalized green. Too quickly, for the peace of the day had flowed into her heart, a peace and a beauty that her sorrow could not exclude, a witchery to which nothing could render her wholesome, healthful nature and mind indifferent.

"I will be in presently, Felicia," said Wayne as he assisted her from the carriage. She noticed that he was pale and constrained.

Felicia went to her room, changed her gown and lay down till he should return.

Presently she heard him come up the steps; she heard the door open and shut; she heard his foot upon the stairs, heavier she thought than usual. She heard a movement in the adjoining room, and supposed it one of the servants. She heard her husband enter the room where she lay. She had closed her eyes. She was conscious that Wayne

had stopped at the threshold, and then, half wondering and half in welcome, she opened her eyes. She saw again, poor, brave Felicia, the fearful look of rage and black and jealous hate and fury that had surcharged her with horror in that unforgettable hour when he had stood before her with that deadly trinket above her breast. Again she saw the menace of a demon uncontrolled in the eyes that had gazed malignly upon her on that other terrible day. Again she read in every unnaturally constrained lineament the sinister mystery of the alien Wayne who had made away with the lover that had wooed her, and in that one brief, all-comprehending insight she divined that the sunset hour of everything had struck for her. She understood as if by a revelation that her husband stood there to do her harm, yet her eyes unwaveringly confronted him, wholly unafraid.

In swift and final review all the dear freight of memory swept before her, and again she saw their twilight confidences at the dear old home; again she saw her father put his arm around her and kiss her and say only "If it pleases my daughter," there in the rose garden where she had brought him to tell him she had pledged her love to Wayne; again she saw Father Leon waiting under the protecting live-oak; again she heard the voice of the priest proclaim her a wife; again she felt her husband's kiss and heard her father's tender blessing.

Then she was conscious that Wayne was speaking, but the voice was not the voice of the Wayne she had known. "It is the unreal Wayne," she thought, "the stranger Wayne, not the husband who loved me in the dear Fernando days."

"Madam—Felicia!" she heard this unknown Wayne say. "You may invoke all the saints in your calendar now, and you have need of all your faith, yet they will avail you nothing!"

Then she stood straight up and firm upon her feet, this daughter of a line of fearless dons, and quavered before him not at all, though she felt it was the end.

"Why will you harm me, Wayne, my husband? Why would you do this to me who have loved you the best that a woman may?"

"Your false faith has led you astray, madam, and I have resolved this is the only way that is left for me and for you."

"Will you kiss me, dear, farewell? I am not afraid! It is all a terrible mistake, Wayne!"

Then the inborn love of life, the supreme instinct for self-preservation possessed her, and swiftly she groped for time. But there could be no time for her. The glitter of a murderer's and a madman's eye was fixed upon her face, and she saw no respite in its fury and its crazed resolve.

"Confess, madam, confess that you have deceived me."

The voice was the cold and hating and bitter voice of that mysterious Wayne, not the Wayne that wooed her on the old veranda in the starlight:

"I have nothing to confess, my husband."

"You lie, madam! You lie!" exclaimed the frantic man.

Then he swiftly raised a pistol.

"It were better for your soul, madam, that you lie not to me now."

Felicia spoke no word. She looked him full in the eye an instant, then slowly collapsed with a cry that was more of a moan.

Hemperton tossed the revolver to the couch and went out. He thought the servants were away. Going to the sideboard he drank heavily of brandy and left the house.

Anita, the maid, entered. She went to her room; then, expecting her mistress to return presently from the drive, looked into Felicia's chamber to make sure that it was in order.

She thought the senora must have dropped in a faint, till, approaching, she saw red stains on her corsage.

"Oh, dear mistress! Dear lady, what is it? What is it? What has happened?"

Felicia slowly opened her eyes. "Only help me Anita—to—the—bed—" she barely whispered. Anita tried but had not the strength, and Felicia helped herself somewhat. She did not bleed much, but she knew the flow was inward and that the hurt was fatal. She felt that she would expire not at once. She wanted to live now to see Constancia and her father, and they could hardly arrive before seven o'clock.

She bade the maid carry a mesage to Father Leon and to her doctor. Anita would go at once, but should she leave her mistress alone? Should she not find the master first?

"He will come, Anita. Go! It does not matter, now, if I am alone."

Anita said to a neighbor that she had found her mistress wounded and would someone please fetch a doctor while she sought the priest.

"Oh, please! Father Leon, will you come at once? Mrs. Hemperton has been shot and I think she is dying!"

The priest made no exclamation. He regarded the maid uncomprehendingly. Then he asked mechanically: "What did you say?"

"My mistress has been wounded, father, by a pistol shot! I found her on the floor! Will you come at once, father?"

A pause, and the priest answered, with a voice so calm as to seem devoid of feeling: "I will go."

Being Christmas, Dr. Widner was at home when the call came. Mrs. Hemperton shot on that beautiful holiday! Incredible! The doctor arrived before the priest, and under his direction Anita and the neighbor quickly had the patient in bed. The wound would complete its work in a few hours. Nothing could be done. Dr. Widner sent for other physicians, and there would be a consultation, but it could be of no avail.

"Where is Mr. Hemperton," asked the doctor.

Anita did not know. She had not seen him since he and her mistress went driving. She had no idea how it happened. Felicia was unconscious, but the doctor thought she would presently revive. She was bleeding to death internally.

But Hemperton must be found. Other near neighbors had come, and by one Dr. Widner sent a message to the police, with request to locate Mr. Hemperton immediately.

Before the message reached there the officer himself appeared with Hemperton, who had gone straight to the station and given the information that his wife had shot herself accidentally. Hemperton was cool—too cool by far the officer thought—but his prompt action was in his favor at least.

When the priest arrived he was conducted at once

to the chamber. He stood for a moment looking upon the dear face, then slowly sank to his knees, bowed his head upon the bed and prayed a long, unspoken prayer.

While he was still kneeling Felicia opened her eyes, conscious now, and seeing the priest drew a hand from under the cover and reached it to his head. Still the priest prayed on.

When at last he arose the face of him had undergone a change the like of which none in that room had ever seen, so transformed and rapt and transfigured was it.

The doctor said she might live till midnight, but that much was doubtful. There was no hope; not any hope at all!

Then the priest, reading Felicia's eyes, took the cross from his breast and placed it in her hand. Slowly she put it to her lips and held it so, saying not a word.

Would he shrive her now, she faintly requested, and ask that her sins be forgiven?

Forgiven! The sins of that sweet soul, that brave and pure and gentle life that never knew a thought not noble, that never had an impulse not wholly unselfish and without guile! Forgive the sins of such a petitioner? Oh, if women, my dears, that are altogether good, with lives so far beyond the lives of men, with hearts so faithful and so true, with love so loyal, if there be sin in these dear saints of earth then God help the world of sinning, selfish men!

When the rites of her faith were concluded with the viaticum, the officer asked:

"Mrs Hemperton, will you please tell us how this happened?"

Felicia closed her eyes. For a time she was silent, so long that he repeated the question and stepped nearer to the bed. Felicia seemed scarcely to breathe, and the officer feared she might expire without making a statement.

Then after a longer wait the weary eyes opened, and she turned toward Hemperton.

"Wayne—dear." It was the merest whisper.

He approached, impassive.

"Kiss me, dear, once!" a fainter whisper.

He bent to touch her lips, still strangely unmoved.

Then so softly that none but he could hear: "I forgive—you—dear—goodby!" and the eyes closed.

Again the officer put his question.

Felicia replied: "It was—an—accident. I—did it myself!"

The officer looked unconvinced.

Then Father Leon requested all to withdraw. He desired to be alone with his dying friend and parishioner. When the door had closed he knelt by the bed. He took Felicia's hand, hot with the fever of her wound and life struggle, in his and bent his forehead upon it. Thus he remained while neither he nor Felicia spoke. Presently she withdrew her hand and rested it upon his head.

"Yes, father, I know—all! You are a good man."

"Felicia, Felicia, it is the man that kneels beside you now, not the priest. The man, O, Felicia! who loved you when you were a girl, but who buried his love deep in his heart. Felicia! Felicia! Long years ago when you rode with me over the fields I almost told you how well I loved you. I almost broke through the vows of priesthood I had taken. I almost foreswore my church, Felicia, to pour my

adoration at your feet. Month after month, year after year, sweet saint, the man and the priest fought the fearful fight. The priest was the victor, Felicia; but in this holy hour the man defies the priest and would have you know the truth. I loved and honored you so immeasurably that I would not have you love the man who had sworn to priesthood and then so near foreswore his vows. It was because the man was unworthy of you, saint among women, that the man let the priest conquer him. I loved you then, and I have adored you to this day, sweet saint, with an adoration that could not touch your life."

The hand gently patted his head as if in soft reproof.

"Yes, Felicia, I shall tell it all, now! Too late the man speaks out the secret and the passion of his life! Too late, Felicia! Too late! Yet it must be told the first and the only time. I may tell the whole truth of it because it is a holy love!" He had raised his head and was gazing raptly on the face flushed by fever. "Yes, it is a consecrated love; consecrated, Felicia, by the years of self-repression, by the self-denial, by its loyalty to your friendship and to—your relation with—him. You have been as a sacred and almost holy one to me, Felicia, and in this last hour I lay my whole life bare for you to know. I want you, sweet saint, to understand it all, to the uttermost! I know that your heart was as loyal to him, Felicia, as your life was lofty, and even so would I have had it. I know that there was no thought that your God and your priest could chasten. I know that never in those dear mission days did you suspect that the man's heart was swell-

ing with a strong man's love behind the priest's black robe and fighting the fight between nature and God! But now, Felicia, in this transcendent hour I want you to know that I, Ferdinand Orvella, a nobleman of Spain, a priest of Rome, loved you in the days when you, a girl on the senor's rancho, ministered to the sick of my parish, rode with me across the slopes, and that I have adored you, saint that you are, through all the after years, and that only my God has understood! And I have been at peace with God because I mastered." The priest's face was transfigured with his transport of emotion and his exaltation. Felicia seemed scarcely to breathe. Father Leon bowed his head again upon the almost pulseless hand.

"Yes, father, I understand. You are a good man." Then, after a little silence. "Pray for me, father." The whisper was as soft as a baby's sigh.

"Pray for you, dear saint! No need have I to intercede for such as you, Felicia! There was no evil thought in all thy life!"

"Pray, father."

Then prayed he, but not for her, a silent supplication for himself that strength be given unto him, that he might stand steadfast, stricken as he was, and be thereafter stronger man and better priest.

He heard the door open and close. He wondered if the don and Constancia had arrived. He felt that he must retire, if it were they. Yet death itself were easier than to leave that consecrated presence.

He laid the limp and feverish palm on his—so broad and strong—and gently caressed the hand. Then once, the first and only time in all their lives, he touched his lips to it, adoringly, with something of

the reverence that the wise men must have felt when they kissed the feet and garments of the Holy Child.

"Felicia, Felicia, O! Felicia!" and Felicia knew that a life-time of unutterable and unspoken love and devotion and self-denial were concentrated in the name, and in that smothered, shaking, soul-conveying voice.

"Yes, father, I understand it all!"

Then the priest arose and passed with head bowed low and with aged and stricken bearing from the chamber.

The don and Constancia had come. Someone had met and prepared them. The daze had stripped his function of thought and speech. It left him mute. He started to speak, then halted, and they who told him thought paralysis had come. But there only crept into his father-eyes the look of a man finally and utterly smitten, so pitiful that to see it was a sight more moving than the surgent of a strong man's tears.

They moved aside, all who had gathered there, and bowed their heads as the old don came supported by Judge Brecknell, his ever-steadfast friend, and the face of the don was a woeful thing to see. Slowly he went upstairs and slowly, as if groping in the dark, to his Felicia's bed.

The judge would have placed a chair, but the old man paid no heed. Upon his knees he slowly fell, saying not a word, nor seeing aught save the face of his stricken child. She knew. They had not told her, but she knew, through messengers unseen and messengers unheard, that the dear old father was there.

"Father, you have come, at last," softly as she had spoken to the father of her babyhood.

"Felicia, it is time to rise, my child. Don't you see, Felicia, the sun is shining in through the window now, my dear, don't you see? There are new roses in your garden, Felicia, to be plucked—roses that bloomed in the night just for you! You—why, you are late, Felicia! Come, now, child, I will wait for you on the veranda, and we will go to the garden together."

For the smitten don was back in the old home again! Again he was calling his little girl—Felicia, the child of the love of his youth. Again for him the morning sun was streaming through the pepper sheen and across the bed of his one dear, motherless daughter. Again for him the roses that Felicia loved were waiting for her gathering and the hounds for the expected patting of her hand. Again the old man saw this bud that grew where his wife, the blossom of his youth, was cut away, reaching her arms to welcome the waking kiss of the father who would be mother, too.

Then he rose slowly, stood straight, looked from the judge in a wild and wondering way back to the face on the pillow as if not comprehending, yet reaching out his wounded mind for the truth.

The judge grasped his hand: "Senor! senor! old friend!" was all he dared try to say.

Then the mind of the don cleared again. "Ah, yes," he said, as if talking only to himself. "I remember, now, they told me that Felicia had been—hurt." Then he moved to the bed and dropped upon his knees again, buried his face in the covers, while Felicia put her hand on his dear old head.

The others left them thus, some time, and when they beheld the don's face again they saw he had not shed a tear, but the mark of the heart that breaks beyond all mending was upon it. And more than that they saw immeasurable anger and a purpose to avenge. They saw the bent old head lift itself erect again, and a flaming, searching inquiry and command flash from the dry old eyes. They saw him throw his shoulders back, as a Sagasto might have done at the head of a legion of Spain.

"Who did this thing?" the don commanded, facing them, his right hand pointing to Felicia, his voice a menace and his bearing again the bearing of his days of perfect strength.

"Who did this thing?" again the stern, peremptory command for the truth.

"Senor," the physician said, "your daughter has told us that it was an accident; that she shot herself while removing the pistol from her bureau drawer."

"It is not the truth! But I know the truth, though you would conceal it from me. I know the truth, though Felicia herself would shield the man. Where is this man Hemperton? He is the man! I cannot be deceived! Tell me, I demand to know, where is the man Hemperton?"

The old man strode imperiously from the room, and into the others on that floor, and then through the rooms below.

"I will find him, and, by God! I will shoot him as he shot my daughter!"

The officer fearing this very possibility, had taken Hemperton quietly away, wholly unobserved. He informed Hemperton that he must consider himself under arrest. The officer had noted the all-too-

cool demeanor of the man in the presence of such a tragedy, and without subjecting him to imprisonment he nevertheless took him into custody and advised Hemperton that he must remain thus, pending the death of his wife.

Therefore the don strode through the house in vain. No one dare approach nor interfere except the judge.

"Where is this man who has murdered my Felicia?" the old man demanded again and again. "Did I not see him when I entered. Would you," he cried, "would you, her friends and mine, shield him from the vengeance which I alone should take? Why do you not help me to find him if you are her friends, instead of helping him to hide from me?"

The force and the fire and the passion and the righteous wrath that transformed the don's face and his whole great frame, and reincarnated it with all the spirit and the power of his completest manhood, revealed to them something of what the prestance and personality of a fighting Sagasto must have been. They better understood from the imperious eye and from that voice resonant with command, from that bearing of a man accustomed to his way, why the senor's pride of name and ancestry had been so constant and so intense.

"Old friend," Judge Brecknell said, "you only make Felicia suffer more, and the man you want is not here, you see. Be more composed. Justice will be done, old friend, if it be the awful truth you think."

Felicia had asked for him, and the judge conducted him back to her, his leonine face melting again as she strove to raise her weakening arm in almost last appeal.

“There, father! Dear old father! Never mind, it is all—right—at last.” And the hand from which the fever was going as the chill and the last pallor crept upon her, lay upon his gray bent head again.

The night wore on. The pageantry of that Christmas day had borne its pomp and circumstance, its robes of gold and reds and purple into the west and out across a winter’s sea that wore a summer’s untroubled face. But there came into the countenance of Felicia, with her hand on the don’s bowed head, a radiance transcending the splendors of all Christmas suns that have flung their pageantry across those Christmas skies since time began—the light that shines from beyond the threshold of another world upon the faces of them that fear not.

CHAPTER XX

The Grieving Don's Pretty Niece.

THE formal arrest of Hemperton was made early on the following morning though he had not been free from surveillance. He was charged with murder. All offers of bail, though extraordinary sums were proposed, were peremptorily refused by the committing magistrate who declared that while he was fully sensible of the previous high character and standing of the accused, and while he quite understood that the probabilities of any attempt at flight were remote, especially in view of the fact that Mr. Hemperton himself had been first to inform the officers of the law, nevertheless he felt bound to require the commitment. A person of lesser consequence, under so grave a charge, would surely be denied the privilege of bail, and people must be informed that the law should not be rigorous for the lesser alone. Therefore Hemperton was obliged to endure incarceration. He seemed greatly surprised and his agitation extreme, but the mastery of his face and his demeanor remained unbroken. So influential a personage could not be wanting in satellites to secretly denounce the harshness of the committing magistrate, and to overwhelm their distinguished but unfortunate fellow citizen

with synpathetic assurance of unchanged esteem. What an outrage thus to put unnecessary indignity upon a man of such high standing! If the possession of much money and a character reproachless, and the ownership of so many acres could not be invoked to purchase some consideration in a crisis such as this, what was the good of money and lands and stocks and directorships and presidencies and social prestige, and all that?

Young Marston Pollock was just entering upon his district attorneyship. Upon him would devolve the unwelcome obligation to prosecute Wayne Hemperton. Pollock had many a time sat at the table of this popular citizen, and eaten his meats and drank his wines and enjoyed the pretty coquetry of the niece of the accused man's wife.

The community at large was profoundly moved, and split into contending camps of friend and foe, as communities generally are at such a time. But not one dissenting voice was raised in the universal tribute to the dead Felicia. Her sweetness and her lofty and generous character were the theme of uncritical praise and admiration, even of the women who had secretly envied her superb beauty and the undisputed social pre-eminence which her qualities of mind and heart, far more than her husband's position, had commanded.

The utter and unexplained and unexplainable mystery of it was the one confusing and all-confounding feature around which public wonder built its fabrics and brought to play its imagination and its gossip. In the city's social life, in the whole history of its public men, in its social feuds, its business rivalries, its militant endeavor—its evolu-

tion from the conglomerate racial deposit of Indians, mulatto and Spaniard and Mexican over whom Francisco de Neve, governor of this New Spain, had raised the flag of his king in 1781 until this day of American possession and American city-making, no crime so mystifying, if indeed it was the crime of uxorcide, no deed of blood so baffling in its cause, so startling, so dramatic, so pathetic and so altogether extraordinary in its attendant circumstance had ever been chronicled in news print or tradition. If it were the culmination of domestic discord it was a deeper mystery still; because, people said, if there was among them a single pair who more than others exemplified the model life, the ideal compatibility, it had been the very Hempertons themselves. If there had been marital discontent, not a note of it had reached the outer world; if there had been inharmony, not a sigh or sign had ever been perceptible to the swiftest and most avid ear and eye of those who ever have an eye swift to see and an ear hungry to hear the first faint sigh of sorrow and protest of infelicity in this human family of ours. The Hempertons had been the ideal married pair; their home and their relations were the envy of many an ill-matched couple whom convention and parenthood alone held together. The unbroken tranquility of their devotion, as it had ever been presented to guest and friend and all who might observe, had inspired many a pastoral theme, had been quoted as an example and a guide of many an admonishing, counseling tongue, and its influence had penetrated and prevailed in more than one menaced home.

Had all society then be deceived? Had there

been a skeleton that never peeped from the Hemper-ton closet? Had the ever-felicitous host and hostess then played one tranquil part before the world only to resume a part not so serene when the doors closed upon their hospitality?

Must the churchman's model be destroyed, and the tongue of counsel confess an imposture? What the secret and what the cause; where the main-spring and where the blame of this most astounding of domestic misfortunes in the local biography?

Society talked, as society will talk, and society speculated as society will speculate; not the society alone which had the entre to that envied and cultured home; not the society only that had sat at the Hemperton table and discussed the Hemperton wines, but all the old city—young only in its Americanized energy and its newly inspired life; all the city wondered, for there was a world that came not to the Hempertons but a world to which Felicia carried the fineness and the strength and the sympathy of her own generous character. That world mourned as the other never could, wondered, lamented and resented with the dull ferocity that felt itself attacked in the violence to its friend and benefactor—yet might not retaliate.

Don Sagasto and Constancia went back to the rancho and the Hemperton residence was closed. The senor recognized the death of Felicia as the finishing blow for him. He requested the judge to prepare a will bequeathing all he possessed to Constancia. The only purposes to which he now directed his thought were the prosecution of the man who, he believed, had murdered his daughter, and the lifting of the burden of indebtedness that rested over the

estate, in order that it might pass without incumbrance to his niece. He was not able to find much hope for accomplishment of the latter. He was old and his force was sorely shattered. He implored the judge to aid him in the management of the property to the end that it might descend intact to Constancia. He would give the judge a second mortgage for any sum, however, if he would aid in the prosecution and conviction of the man whom he believed to be guilty.

Not a penny would the judge accept, not a mortgage nor a scrap of paper nor any pledge nor promise.

"My dear old friend," the lawyer said, "I ceased to have any respect for Hemperton when his transparent purpose to get possession of your land became fixed in my mind. You may rest assured I will do my utmost. I believe with you that he deliberately did this thing. Never a cent will you pay to me, and I will help you all I can to clear the property for Constancia. You stay at the rancho and let Constancia look after you, and leave everything else to me."

What troubled the judge was the same mysterious features about the tragedy that perplexed everybody else—if Hemperton really killed his wife, *why* did he do it? That he was a thoroughly selfish man the judge had long before become convinced. With all of Hemperton's rather ostentatious generosity and hospitality and public spirit, there lay back of it and under it a hard substratum of ingrained greed and hardness of nature that little traits, unseen by the public, disclosed. But mere selfishness of nature, no matter how deeply ingrained, was hardly sufficient to account for so fearful an act. Search as he might for a motive and an impulse the lawyer could hit

upon none to which his reason could ascribe even a shadow of sufficiency. He knew the unbridgable dissimilarity in their religious views, but their disagreement had never penetrated beyond their threshold, and as an actuating or even as a contributing cause it must be utterly dismissed, the lawyer argued to himself and when discussing the case with Pollock. The judge and the new prosecuting attorney spent many an hour in long and patient exploration into the whys and wherefores of Felicia's death. If Hemperton did not do it, there remained only one other solution—the theory of accident; but neither the old lawyer nor the young seriously considered that, notwithstanding Mrs. Hemperton's dying declaration. They believed that Hemperton did the shooting; but the evidence thus far was merely circumstantial, so very circumstantial that a jury would most likely be extremely probable to disregard it in view of the harmonious relations supposed to exist between Hemperton and his wife. The cause would not be brought to bar for several months, at any rate, and meantime they had the fact of the violent death upon which to predicate a motive and develop evidence more conclusive than that of inconclusive circumstance.

In the course of a very few weeks there came to young Mr. Pollock a great desire to see the pretty niece of the don again. Not that he had been without the desire for many days together. Had he not, indeed, been one of the few young gentlemen who heroically exposed their hearts to the winsomeness and coquetry of the pretty niece on that fateful Christmas day? Had he not been near when was told to her the shocking story of her cousin's hurt

and had he not longed to comfort her and condole with her and in some way assuage the grief that was rending that tender heart; a heart that grief had hitherto but lightly touched; for she had been too young to feel its force when her father and mother perished in turbulent Mexico. But Pollock was a man of sense and feeling, and dearly as he would have desired to put his sympathy into words he quietly excused himself, after he had called a carriage and had seen the senor and his niece driven homeward, and went straight to find the judge. He had not gone to the house of grief. The judge desired it, but his sense of delicacy informed him that his relation with the Hempertons was scarcely familiar enough to justify the intrusion. So he had but barely seen Constancia since that tragic day, though his thoughts had turned to the Sagasto home and the grieving girl and the lonely don. But now he desired to go. Did the judge think he could with propriety do so? Yes, most certainly he did. The don liked Pollock, the judge was positive, and the don and his niece would be cheered. The judge himself would go along, but for one important thing. Pollock must tell them that he, the judge, was working out the case with all possible thoroughness. Pollock was to make particular inquiry as to what the don knew of the family and antecedents of his son-in-law, where he had come from and why he had come to the west. He was to probe as deeply as he could into the senor's knowledge, and that of Constancia as well, concerning the relations between Felicia and her husband.

The don's welcome was pathetically subdued, but none the less sincere. Constancia was in every way

gracious and frankly glad to see him. Youth does not grieve itself away. Constancia did not love Felicia's memory less merely because her pulse beat full and regular with good, red, healthy blood; she talked unhesitatingly about the case. It would have been incredible that Cousin Wayne could be guilty, but she must confess she knew that he had been harsh and unkind to Felicia, and certainly her cousin had been unhappy. She did not tell, however, the story of that dramatic hour when the priest was present, and when Hemperton's rage fell in a very cloud-burst upon them and almost wrought a tragedy then and there. She did not tell because she would not then, at least, involve the priest without his consent. She thought to herself that she might tell the story later on. She supposed she might have to testify at the trial of Hemperton. She would be relieved to avoid it, but she would speak if she must, and if it should appear that the story of that assault of Hemperton's would be necessary to the strength of the defense she would tell even that. It was impossible that she should not feel sorry for her Cousin Wayne. It would have been wholly unnatural if, with all her resentment of the cutting, cruel things she had heard him say to Felicia, and notwithstanding the unforgettable fury of his face and conduct when he held that knife threateningly before Felicia, notwithstanding her profound conviction that Wayne had shot his wife in another volcanic irruption of rage; it would have been unnatural indeed had Constancia not been sensible of a degree of sympathy and had not dreaded any eventuality that would require her testimony against Felicia's husband. She had not consulted with

Father Leon, either about the threat made by Wayne upon Felicia to which the priest had been a witness, during the lifetime of Felicia, or about the final tragedy; nor had she even seen him, since that Christmas night, to speak with him save in the presence of her uncle, and then only concerning the services over the dear dead. She had come with her uncle straight to the rancho retreat as quickly as possible, after that. But she resolved that she would have a long and early interview with Father Leon and he should decide what course was best. Constancia had not told her uncle about that assault of Wayne's. She had tried not to think of it.

She told the young lawyer how sorry she was that it fell to him to prosecute Mr. Hemperton.

"I am not sorry, senorita, since it gives me an opportunity to serve you and the don. I wish indeed that another than Mr. Hemperton were involved, but I am firmly convinced that he is guilty, and I propose to bring to bear all the force that I can summon to convict him. I was bound to feel respect for him as the husband of your cousin, and he had been hospitable to me; but as a matter of fact he has always impressed me as a very strange personality. I think we shall convict him, though I confess that at present the evidence is not as strong as I wish it were."

Then at his request to tell more of what she remembered of Hemperton's harshness Constancia related numerous instances, but still kept far away from the most dramatic fact of all.

"Shall I have to appear in court?" she asked.

"I think, indeed, you must. The case will be defended with great force, no doubt, and we shall

need every bit of evidence that we can bring to bear."

Don Sagasto was extremely bitter in thought and speech against Hemperton. To convict this man who he believed had murdered Felicia had become his supreme passion. He brooded upon it by day and passed sleepless hours in the long nights thinking, thinking, thinking where and how the evidence against Hemperton might be reinforced. Ever since that Christmas night when he had risen from the bedside of Felicia and strode on an avenging quest through the rooms of the Hemperton mansion to find and strike down her murderer, the old don had formed a purpose fixed with all the firmness of avenging fatherhood to shoot Hemperton in the court room if the trial should fail to result in conviction and sentence of death, or at least life imprisonment. Felicia should be avenged. The utter wantonness of her taking off should have its full measure of punishment. If through insufficiency of evidence or by the invoking of any of the multitude of resources and makeshifts and legal cleverness familiar to shrewd lawyers Hemperton should be acquitted or inadequately sentenced, then he—the father of Felicia—would invoke a justice of his own that no fine trick of eloquence or technicality could circumvent. Never a word nor an intimation of this resolve should escape him, but it became, not by slow degrees, but at once, as a matter of course and necessity, as definitely formed and unchangeable a resolution as his intent to rise in the morning and retire at night and take his meals and attend the trial.

The don did not know, he replied to Pollock, where Hemperton had resided in his youth. He had asked,

and he believed Hemperton had told him, but the name of the town he could not recall. He had reproached himself many and many a time since the tragedy for not having ascertained more about the antecedents of his son-in-law before consenting to the union with Felicia. But it had not been his way. He had taken Hemperton at his own face value. Hemperton said that his father had held a high place in some eastern city, but he could not now recall the name.

As for evidence of friction between Felicia and her husband the old man could not give the prosecuting attorney much to fortify his case. He had really observed but little indication of domestic trouble. He knew Felicia's pride was so great and her resources so subtle that she was entirely equal to almost complete concealment, even through a long course of years, if there were any acts of her husband's to disillusion and humiliate and wound her loving heart and high spirit. The don thought Constancia, having dwelt with the pair so long, could tell much that might have a direct and vital bearing. The don had believed, he said, for a long time, that his daughter was unhappy, but he had never presumed to question, and he could not point to any specific offending act of Hemperton or speech of Felicia to prove anything like a discord or serious trouble between them. He believed that Hemperton possessed a dark and furious nature, with great power of self-control; that his urbanity cloaked a volcano of a temper, and almost inordinate but subtly dissimulated love of self.

Pollock's stay at the rancho was somewhat less than twenty-four hours. Shortly before he was to

go to the station old Tizza, beady-eyed as ever, and shrunken, with footfall as noiseless as a panther, said: "Senor, he did it! He killed my beautiful mistress!"

Pollock did not know Tizza was near. He was just that minute alone, he thought, walking meditatively and saunteringly not far from the house. He had not heard her approach, and her sudden whisper surprised him. She seemed almost uncanny. Tizza somehow knew that he was the man who was going to punish the bad men.

"He killed her! He? Who, Tizza?"

"The Senor Hemperton!"

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I have a way to know, senor. You will find that he shoot her."

"I hope indeed we shall find out, Tizza. I wish you had proof of what you think."

"You will find so, senor."

There was plenty of fatidical opinion, but evidently opinion only, to be had from Tizza, and Pollock would take with him back to the judge and the case but slight fortifying material and considerable disappointment; though he could not have said why he should have been disappointed, or why he should have come expecting enough to make disappointment possible.

He had wanted above everything else to see Constanca again. He had seen her, had heard her dear voice, he had felt that warm, firm little hand clasp firmly his. He was much in love with this niece of the don. And the rose garden and the twilight and the romantic old veranda, where Hemperton had wooed Felicia, tempted him to a little wooing him-

self; but the imminence of the shadow of that Christmas day imposed upon the young man's sense of the fitness of things a restraint he would not then resist. He was exceedingly fond of Constancia, and the dear girl was lovelier than ever, and altogether statuesque in her black gown that made her fair face fairer and the lines of her filling figure even more graceful and well-defined.

He did once dare, however, to take Constancia's hand, white and shapely, and even put it to his lips, half afraid, before she said good-night. He told her that he felt the time was not far off when he could be of service to her and to the don, who had so well befriended him.

Could he have known, just then and there, this strong and confident young man, with his strong heart full of manly love for this winsome maiden; could he have known how every thought and force that he brought to bear upon this strange mysterious case was weaving a web in which his own man's life and heart were being drawn; could he have looked but a few brief weeks into the future and seen, as he stood there holding the white hand of his love, how his own soul would be wrung and the mystery of his own childhood tragically unfolded from the scroll that held the mystery of the death of Felicia; could he have known that he himself was soon to be the instrument to rip away another veil concealing a fate as strange and as pathetic as the fate of the mother-cousin of this woman he loved, he might then have yearned for sympathy where now he bestowed it, he might have clung more tightly to that soft and yielding hand for an inflow of kinship in distress, he might indeed have well invoked a

common succor for himself and her, all this and more. Could he have known, he might have fallen prostrate to adore and say farewell, and tear him unmanned but not unmanly nor unworthy, a victim but not an offender, from that sweet and gracious presence.

But he could not know! And well it was for him, well for him and well for her, that that other somber thread that fate was weaving into the lives of them should not be thrust around him till his work of dissolving the other mystery and binding up the frazzled ends of the other woof were done.

She was very like Felicia, this cousin that Felicia had loved as a daughter and had reared as one, this ripening human flower with a face nearly as lovely as Felicia's face had been at her years, with a mind attuned to the thoughts and tastes that had marked the fine superiority of Felicia. The mantle of Felicia seemed to have wrapped itself about Constancia, so closely did the senor's niece resemble the daughter in face and figure, in habits of thought, in quick and sensitive perceptions, in beauty and character, in all that went to make up the whole glorious, lofty type of womanhood of the living, loving Felicia.

No, Pollock would now but lightly touch on the gentle theme of his love; he would but approach, this time, the outer-threshold of the golden temple of his dreams wherein the mistress of his heart presided, and content himself with adoring from afar. But he would cross the sacred precincts another time, and spread the treasures of his love before her and ascertain for once and all if the love of such a one as she could be for him.

Constancia and the don urged him to return and

bring the judge. Before, the don said, they had not understood what it was to be lonesome; but sometimes they did know, now. They would have him remain another day, but, finding he could not, they drove with him to the station.

Everybody at the station seemed to know that he was the prosecuting attorney, and everybody wanted to hear if there were any news about the case. Did he think Hemperton had done it? Wasn't it much more probable that Mrs. Hemperton had really shot herself accidentally? Wasn't it even more probable that an unknown and unthought of person had entered the house and shot her, perhaps intending only to rob?

This third person theory had been discussed by Judge Brecknell and Pollock, but there being absolutely no justification for it and not a scrap of evidence to sustain it, they had been compelled to dismiss it. Felicia herself would of course have established it if there had been the least foundation for the theory.

"You wouldn't object, would you, Father Leon, if I should tell the lawyers about that scene that Felicia's husband made one day when you were present?" Constancia asked, a week or two afterward. Of course she knew nothing of the law nor the processes of prosecution, but she did want to help to bring the murderer of her cousin to justice. She knew nothing of the relative value of evidence, but it seemed to her the more she thought of it that it would be important to Mr. Pollock to know that Wayne had raised his hand in violence against his wife. The more she dwelt upon it the more firmly her resolution formed to tell him, but first she must get the priest's consent to draw him into it. Then

she had called to see Father Leon for this particular purpose. Father Leon had been revolving that very subject over and over with himself. During the first days after the shooting he was like a man in a stupor. He came and went about his daily duties with the manner of one bereft of power to smile or feel. He remained for the most part secluded within his study. He gave no thought to the prisoner awaiting trial for the crime of that Christmas day. The bullet that struck Felicia's life away had shattered the wall of self-repression which he had raised between his priestship and the love of that other human self of him. The spiritualized Felicia was re-embodied by that fatal shot, and all the passionate outreaching of his young manhood's nature toward that dear martyr returned with the force and transcending power of those mission days. Again the priest was swept aside, and the man that loved was uppermost and dominating and loving and suffering. The priest in him was not struggling now. The man was indulging his love in a memory that began in the supreme bliss of that youthful and complete adoration, and ended where a woman's pulseless hand lay on his bended head. During those first few days he made no effort whatever to reassert his priestship or to dissipate the stupor of composite bliss and grief—regrets and joyous satisfaction, regret that he had not become the man he strove to be when he saw and loved, joy for having told her all even in that consecrated hour when death stood guard beside him to begrudge to him the telling—that enveloped and possessed him. He knew that this state of mind could not continue, but the man in him should have the right-of-way

for dreams again, for the dear sweet dreams of long departed youth and love! The coming of Constancia, with this wanting to know, was the first demand for self-resumption; it was a summons to the priest again to forswear the manship and take up the vicar's.

Would he object if she should tell the tale of that morning rage of Hemperton's when the man in himself had almost overthrown the priest for one brief hour? Would she mean to tell it all, he wondered before he answered. If that would imply that he must say to the court and to all the gaping, curious world what he had said to the three of them, he could not, at least he would not, thus desecrate the memory of her, he would not publicise his inner self; he would not expose this consecrated relation before a throng that could not understand. No he would not—not even to convict the murderer of Felicia. Not one would comprehend, not one could comprehend or sympathize. It would appear but cheap romance—the priest in love with his beautiful parishioner. It was a thing impossible to him, and still more impossible and sacrilegious because of her.

“Constancia, I myself will tell the lawyers of that attack upon your cousin. It is not necessary to tell the rest. I will see Mr. Pollock. You may leave it to me.”

Constancia expressed relief.

Father Leon addressed a note to the prosecuting attorney asking if Mr. Pollock would do him the honor of calling and kindly bring Judge Brecknell.

The information which the priest conveyed was of the utmost importance, declared both lawyers. It would exercise great influence upon the minds of the jurymen. The priest avoided the use of the word

jealousy, but confined the cause of Hemperton's assault to a mind overwrought by its increasing antagonism to his wife's faith and to his, the priest's, association in the mind of Hemperton with the idea of her great devotion to the church.

The priest recognized that he would be placed in a most delicate and embarrassing position should he be called to testify, and if the counsel for defense should probe too deeply into all that had transpired on that morning. But he would take that chance for her sake. If he must tell everything he would invoke the blessed memory of her to inspire him to tell it with an adroitness that would open no cleavage for misunderstanding and indelicate gossip.

Many times before the case of Wayne Hemperton came to bar, young Marston Pollock, prosecuting attorney, made the trip to the home of Don Sagasto and Senorita Constancia Sagasto. There were continuances and postponements, generally quite as much desired by the defense as by the prosecution. Neither side had yet been able to construct a very powerful case. The defense was professing utmost confidence, but Pollock and the judge agreed that it was due rather to the defense's belief in the prosecution's lack of direct evidence than to the possession of any evidence that the defendant did not commit the crime. Both sides, as a matter of fact, were sparring for time; both hoping against hope for the discovery of evidence for and against, and therefore the case of *The People vs. Hemperton*, charge of murder in the first degree, underwent many postponements on the calendar, and therefore the prisoner was not arraigned for trial for months. And therefore young Mr. Marston Pollock, prosecuting attorney though

he was, to whom was committed the very considerable task of securing the conviction of Wayne Hemperton charged with shooting his wife to death one Christmas afternoon, found time, and found it many times indeed, to spend hours and sometimes a day or so at the old Sagasto home where this same man Hemperton had found Felicia in the days of her blossoming girlhood, had wooed her there in sun and twilight, in mountain shadow and with the roses blooming around, had wooed and had wed her:—found time to woo Constancia, cousin and after-type of Felicia; wooed her by day and by moonlight, in mountain shadow, in the rose garden, as Felicia had been wooed and won before.

The old dogs barked and the young dogs romped and the great oriflamme of a tail of the St. Bernard waved its friendly salutation and adieu, all as in the days when another man wooed another maid and bore her away to sorrow and to her tragic death.

Across the slopes and the fields they rode, young Marston Pollock and this pretty niece of the breaking old don, up the slopes to the north, and down the slopes to the west and south where the poppy rioted in winter gold, but the fields were gray and tawny—in these hazy September days. And he wooed as they rode, by day and by starlight, for he loved her with all his manly and honest heart. He told her that he loved her in the good, plain, honest, loving words that any good woman may well be proud to hear. He told her what every real downright lover has said ever since the first lovers said those dear words to first dear, palpitating girls, that she was the dearest and the loveliest girl in all the world; that he had loved her such a long, long time and that he

was afraid sometimes she did not care a bit for him, and that again some other times he thought she really did, and maybe even loved him a little, and that if he was very ambitious, as he was, it was all for her; and that she was his inspiration and his hope, and that he knew he wasn't worthy to kiss the soles of her dear, little, dusty shoes; but he loved her, he loved her, he loved her, and would she promise to be his wife? He had brought his horse as close to hers as they could walk and, would you believe it, this eminently proper and ambitious young prosecuting attorney positively put his arm across and let it rest upon her waist—hers, Constancia's, this lovely niece of the grieving old don, who grieved herself, sometimes, but who was too full of life and good red blood and good honest woman's love to grieve much or to do much of anything else, just then, but love and be very glad that this young and eminently proper and ambitious young prosecuting attorney was right there saying lovings things to her that very minute.

And, would you believe it, that dear and most adorable maiden, who had been bred so properly by Cousin Felicia, positively did not go galloping away nor tell the prosecuting attorney that she would be much obliged to him if he would remove his arm! Not a bit of it, my dears! Not a bit of it! Indeed, perhaps such things should never be told on pretty young nieces, nor pretty anybody elses; but however can so interesting a fact be suppressed that this lovely and altogether lovable senorita, this niece of the resolute old don, just rode demurely along, and, truly it must be said, leaned a little, just ever so little, toward this ambitious prosecuting attorney;

and would you believe it, after riding thus demurely, and with the most bewitching pink showing on each soft, white cheek,—just like the rose-pink that suffused the sky there over the hills when the sun went splashing into sea,—she turned a pair of radiant eyes toward this prosecuting attorney who thereupon completely lost his head and forgot every bit of a thing about the people's business and,—and, well, then if you must know, my dears, I do believe he really kissed a pair of the scarlettest, ripest, dewiest lips that ever tempted an honest, mortal adoring lover!

CHAPTER XXI

The Trial

WHEN at last the prosecuting attorney arose to present the celebrated case of the *The People vs. Hemperton* he faced such a throng as the yellow, dingy brick court house had never included before in all its yellow and dingy history. The unspacious apartment was filled long before the hour for calling the docket, and eager and disappointed hundreds crowded the hall and even the stairway, while hundreds more were grouped along the sidewalk or had invaded adjacent rooms. Public interest was glowing. Notwithstanding that more than eight months had elapsed since the death of Mrs. Hemperton the townspeople had abated none of their wonderment and regret. Every scrap of information bearing upon the case obtainable by newspapers had been published and republished time and again. Public opinion had been divided and subdivided and arrayed and rearrayed into camps and phalanxes of zealous and contentious friends and foes and doubters and defenders of the prisoner. Despite the utter lack of evidence to support such a theory, there had spread abroad the belief that neither had Mrs. Hemperton shot herself by accident, nor was her husband a murderer, but that a third person had

fired the fatal shot. The complete misinformation on the part of the public as to Hemperton's sullen attitude toward his wife, coupled with his reputation for urbane temper, raised in behalf of his innocence many a champion and silenced many an accusing tongue.

Hemperton's long incarceration had of itself incubated not a little sympathy, and there were not wanting those to say that he should have enjoyed his liberty on bail, forgetting that the commitment of this influential man was a defense and a safeguard for the less powerful and less deferred-to. The prisoner had been solaced by attentive and resolute friends, and he had deported himself discreetly. The judge had steadfastly refused to admit him to bail, though quite extraordinary pressure had been brought to bear. It began to be whispered after a while that the judge had in the past struck up against a sharp corner of a business or a political transaction with Hemperton, somewhere, and was poulticing his abraded feelings with a morsel of revenge.

The evidence against the prisoner being generally understood to be circumstantial and inconclusive, public disapproval of the magistrate's continued denial of bail rather steadily increased and manufactured active and outspoken sympathizers for the accused.

But now, the prints announced, the trial of Wayne Hemperton was really to begin. People of station and people of no station at all elbowed and crowded and jostled and corkscrewed themselves, as many as could, into the stuffy court. Promptly at ten o'clock the presiding judge stepped from the door

that opened from his private chambers and took his seat under the awesome canopy that kingcraft has bequeathed to our unkingly institutions. Anticipating the crush of spectators Hemperton had been brought in a closed carriage long before the throng assembled. Accompanied by half a dozen former business associates, and men of affairs about town, he had remained quietly talking in a room next to the private office of Judge Denman. Directly the court had opened the prisoner and the prisoner's lawyers, and the bailiff and the gentlemen who had been keeping Hemperton company, appeared through the door by which the judge had entered and promptly took their seats. Hemperton faced the magistrate and therefore the greater body of spectators could get but occasional and imperfect view of his immobile features. As he had entered he sent just one swift and sweeping glance across the little throng of his fellow citizens, recognizing in the instant some who had sat at his table and played their part in his social and business orbit. It seemed to him that sympathy and confidence, rather than distrust and condemnation, were depicted in the general aspect of the faces that confronted him so intently, and he wondered whether it was his own imagination, his own natural desire to have it so, that made them so appear.

Great as was his habitual composure, and master of his own countenance as he prided himself upon being, he knew that he had gone gray as a hewn stone statue when he stepped into full and concentrated view of that inhiate, questioning crowd. He had not intended to do that. He had so fortified himself by resolution, he thought, that he would be able to look every man and woman of the crowd he

knew would surely be there full in the face, and nod and smile familiarly as if he were taking his place on a public platform to meet his fellow townsmen, as he had scores of times before, on matters of public concern.

But the sensation of the instant had been too overwhelming for even his complacency and studied control to withstand. The terrible significance of the scene and the occasion forced itself upon him as it had never before in all the months of his incarceration.

The prosecuting attorney, Marston Pollock, who had been his guest more times than one, bowed distantly.

Then the business of making up a jury was immediately begun. Manifestly there would be much difficulty and delay. Few indeed were there among possible jurors in the county who had not read of the violent death of Mrs. Hemperton on a Christmas day, and who had not already formed a more or less fixed opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the prisoner at bar. Many of the panel knew the defendant personally and had had more or less business relations with him; some had known his wife, and all had read or heard about the offices of mercy and kindness upon which she delighted to be engaged.

Man after man was called, examined and excused; and when the hour of adjournment came at five o'clock not half a jury had been accepted by the shrewd and ever-watchful attorneys. It was well into the afternoon of the second day before the full twelve were winnowed out and passed upon by both the prosecution and defense and the jury sworn and the trial ready to begin.

Then the prosecuting attorney arose to present

the case. In the few months of his incumbency men had already come to know that a young man of no ordinary talent and causticity had been elected. The penetration and torture of his questioning was inquisitorial, his knowledge of law and his readiness of resource surprising to the older lawyers, many of whom, presuming as seasoned lawyers will, upon his youth, to tease and override and bully, had run against the prickles of his wit and barked their legal shins upon the rocky obstructions which his agile mind dumped in their sometimes too precipitate and disregarding path.

The prosecuting attorney had had no case to prosecute whose importance was in any way commensurate with the case of *The People vs. Hemperton*. In the sense that it required him to endeavor to send to the penitentiary or to the gallows a man with whom he had amicably associated, Pollock dreaded to undertake it; but on the other hand the intensely dramatic and tragic elements in the case, the absorbing public interest surrounding it, the distinction of the defending counsel, the extraordinary nature of the crime, the mystery as to its motive, the social and business pre-eminence of the prisoner at bar, the still badly disconnected chain of evidence going to prove the defendant's guilt, his own profound belief, however, that Hemperton was guilty, and that this suave, self-complacent, self-contained man of affairs was in his very heart a volcanic and a dangerous person, all conspired to whip the intellectual activities of the prosecuting attorney to put forth their acutest strenuosity and had brought into action the untested as well as the practiced resources of his mind and his experience.

He was regretfully aware of the incompleteness of the evidence with which he must begin the prosecution. He was far too keen a lawyer not to know that while the circumstances strongly went to establish the fact that Hemperton had fired the shot, and that Hemperton's long continued harsh and cruel language to his wife, which would astonish the public; and the prior murderous threat of assault, which would be a still more astonishing revelation and which must in the very nature of things impress and move the jury; still there was wanting, after all, the direct proof that the husband of the dead woman was the assailant.

Judge Brecknell had had to confess his own disappointment over this very insufficiency. He had brought to bear in Pollock's behalf and on behalf of Don Sagasto all of his own adroitness of mind to fortify the argument which the prosecuting attorney would have to make. He drew countless sight drafts upon his great fund of observation and experience and legal reading and the history of mysterious and difficult cases. The judge at his own expense employed detectives with the hope of discovering bricks of incidents and evidence more firm upon which to build the superstructure of their case. One of the most discouraging results of his investigations was the complete ignorance of everybody regarding the youthful whereabouts and antecedents of the accused. The judge had been utterly unable to trace the movements and doings of Hemperton back of his appearance many years before in San Francisco, where first he established relations with the railroad company in whose employ he had come to Southern California. Beyond that was a

confounding and seemingly unilluminable blank which defied the judge and yet cemented in his mind the conviction that within that adumbrant and apparently inaccessible chapter lay a something not entirely unconnected with this hitherto baffling case.

The judge reluctantly saw that the action must proceed to trial. There could be no further delay. The defense had become more confident and therefore much less patient with postponement. Pollock himself was far less sanguine than he pretended to be; and when he looked upon the tense, expectant throng, and when he studied those sphinxy-faced jurymen, he realized that the chances were very considerable that all of his eloquence and invective, all his magnifying of circumstance to the very limit of reasonableness, would crumble under the single, simple fact of insufficiency of direct proof. But he must make the most of such material as he had in hand. His presentation of the case was brief and with but tentative flight into eloquence. He recited the facts which already were familiar to the public. The prosecution of this man, he said, facing Hemper-ton, was a duty which he would have avoided if he might, because he had been favored with the defendant's hospitality at a period when the attention of such a man was particularly valued.

"I have the more appreciated the consideration of successful men," he said, "because my own boyhood was a fatherless boyhood, and my youth deprived of the counsel and the affectionate sympathy so precious and so needful to the young. I would that another than he might be sitting there; I would that the evidence which it is my duty to present were to be woven around the fate of another than Wayne

Hemperton, whose hospitable doors have ever yielded before my grateful hand; or, since he it is who is accused, then I would that another people's advocate than I were standing here to denounce him as the man whose hand struck down that superlative woman who was his wife. And prosecuting attorney though I am, and sworn to an instrumentality of the people's will, I might nevertheless forswear my oath and shrink from the prosecution of this incredible case were it not for an appeal that comes to me from beyond the grave; aye! though that voice now silent would in the plenitude of its affection have shielded the hand that struck it dumb—were it not for the appeal from beyond the grave that raises for justice a cry more loud than the voice of love and mercy! The abhorrent charge against this defendant might seem indeed as unbelievable a thing to me as it may to you, were it not for some astounding facts which will be forthcoming, which were unknown to me until long after that serene but tragic Christmas afternoon; facts hitherto unknown and unsuspected among the multitude of people who have heard the honorable name of Hemperton to be synonymous for probity among men, and for pulchritude virtue and superexcellent womanhood among all woman-kind; somber facts that strip away the habiliments of disguise from the character of the man whom you think you have known and thrust him here before you, dissected and undisguised, the sinister and cruel and double-natured character of the man no man has known."

A very tremolo of quickened curiosity diapasoned the intent auditors and communicated electrically through the groups in the hall below. The word

had passed that the brilliant Marston Pollock was addressing the jury, and the fragments of people scattered somewhat by the tedium of jury-making drew together again into a compact and avid body. The words of the prosecuting attorney were portentous. They fell upon the listeners with fore-promising of evidence more ominous to come, they hinted at revelations to feed the wondering minds already half prepared and half expecting strange and uncanny tales; they vaguely touched on the borderland of the mysteries of this mysterious case and quickened the natural avid, sensing, curious interest.

When the prosecuting attorney resumed his seat he felt the alternating currents of that tense throng, made tenser as he spoke, concentrating in and upon him. He knew that he had committed himself to a test from whose reaction he would be flung with something akin to wrathfulness if his evidence fell short of the measure of the tension his manner as much as his words had set. He had plunged with even greater boldness into that unknown sea of untold uncompleted fact than he had intended. But he had plunged and he must swim. He had hurled himself upon the bosom of the event of the thing, and he was thereafter to be borne with a swiftness that he could neither measure nor withstand upon its fateful current. There was a sense of being cast quite adrift, within him, as the passion of the moment swept from him to the people and back to him again. He did not quaver, but there stole upon him a vague sensation of affinity with the fate of the accused man whom he had been denouncing and whom he must denounce more bitterly still. Protean recollections besieged his imagination and went trooping

through in the insightful, introspective flashlights of feeling that play in and out of the souls of men in their more highly supersensitized moments.

"Call the witnesses for the prosecution," ordered the judge.

Anita took the stand. She recited the story of the finding of her wounded mistress near the couch where she had evidently fallen directly after the shot. Mrs. Hemperton was not conscious when Anita appeared. At first the witness thought Mrs. Hemperton was dead, but she opened her eyes. No, she had no idea how long her mistress had been lying there. She had asked how it happened, but Mrs. Hemperton had remained silent. Anita had assisted her to a couch. She did not at first observe the stain of blood on the corsage, nor did she see the weapon on the couch till she undertook to help her mistress to a more comfortable position. Anita quite preserved her self-possession, and even under cross-questioning by defendant's lawyer was not confused. Then other servants were placed upon the stand, but their testimony was of no material aid to either side, except that their lack of information rather helped the defense by the mere fact of disclosing nothing that tended to incriminate.

During almost all of the third and fourth days the Senorita Constancia and Don Sagasto were testifying or were on the stand for the purpose of giving testimony, but there were innumerable delays owing to the interposition and objections by the attorneys. Pollock had with extreme reluctance seen Constancia take the witness chair. He dreaded that the curious public should be permitted to look upon the ordeal of her recital of all the painful circumstances of that

Christmas night, and most of all he suffered in knowing how she would suffer to relate the instances of Hemperton's taunting and cruel remarks to his wife during the past few years, to say nothing of having to enter intimately into a description of the assault that Hemperton had attempted with the knife.

The whole of Constancia's testimony was a great surprise to the spectators and no less so, of course, to the defendant's attorneys. Her evidence was the first fulfillment of the prosecuting attorney's intimation of what was to come. Constancia's youth and brilliant beauty, her close relationship to Mrs. Hemperton and to the old don, and through Felicia to the defendant, her distinguished bearing, her garments of heavy mourning, together with the surprising and sensational character of her revelations, concentrated upon her the most intense interest. In her quiet, soft but entirely distinct voice she was delivering the most damaging evidence that had been offered against the defendant. Under it Hemperton paled slightly, but otherwise retained his impassiveness. The cross-fire of Hemperton's attorneys, protracted and severe, utterly failed to disturb the calm connectedness of Constancia's narration, and when at last she was excused the prosecuting attorney was so proud and so fond of her that he yearned to tell her so. Don Sagasto could scarcely be called a good witness. His association with his daughter after her marriage was so much less than Constancia's that he possessed meager information as to the relative harmony or inharmony of the Hempertons' relations. But as to what he had observed he testified with exceeding

bitterness. His consuming desire to convict Hemperton carried him into many an excess of language and opinion which were inadmissible as evidence but which were not wholly lost upon the jury, and which in the very nature of things intensified the interest of spectators.

Arguments over objections and contentions respecting the admission of testimony, and the interrogation and calling and recalling of witnesses carried the trial well into the fifth day, with the finish still more days away.

All in all the evidence tending to fasten the shooting directly upon Hemperton was still inconclusive and the confidence of his lawyers was increasing. The impression was obtaining among spectators and the public outside that the defendant would be acquitted or that the jury would disagree. During the fifth afternoon immediately after Hemperton himself had left the stand, at the conclusion of an emphatic denial of inharmony between himself and his wife, emphatic denial of having fired the fatal shot, and equally emphatic denial of having previously threatened his wife with an upraised knife, an incident which he declared had been grossly misunderstood and exaggerated by Constancia and by Father Leon, whose testimony had produced a profound effect decidedly unfavorable to the accused—there was a movement among the crowd at the door. People rather irritably made way for a coppery, wrinkled little old woman muffled in a black rebozo. They noticed that her eyes were exceedingly bright and penetrating notwithstanding the age imprinted upon every weazened feature. So extreme was the interest fixed upon the witness who had testified,

and who had just risen from the chair, that the little old figure in the shawl was scarcely observed till it stood at the railing that separated the bar from the spectators. The little old figure lingered but an instant at the gate. The little old figure with the beady eyes walked straight and unbidden and without asking to the prosecuting attorney, whose face was toward the court. The little old figure did not touch the shoulder of the prosecuting attorney, nor did she look at Constancia nor at the don, her master, both of whom were altogether amazed.

"Senor, he done it," she whispered in Pollock's ear. He turned surprised, inquiring eyes to the uncanny face.

"Tizza! what in the world are you doing here?"

"He done it, senor, the Senor Hemperton."

"Tizza, what do you know? Why do you say such a thing when you could not possibly know anything about it? Now please go away and do not annoy us."

"I tell you, he done it, he shoot the senorita. If you do not want to hear, then I tell the man up there." She was looking at Pollock, but her brown and withered finger pointed at the presiding judge.

The prosecuting attorney was becoming impatient. This bothersome servant of Don Sagasto was clearly possessed of a mania. For the don's sake he would be indulgent, but she was becoming a nuisance. She had been talking in a very low tone. No one heard save Pollock.

"We are waiting on you, Mr. Pollock," said the judge.

"Yes, if the court please, just a minute."

"Now, Tizza, you must go away. I have not time to talk now." He half turned from her.

"Senor, he shoot my mistress. I see him shoot her."

"What! Why, Tizza, you were twenty miles from the house when Mrs. Hemperton was shot! What are you talking about?"

"Senor, I see him, the Senor Hemperton, shoot my mistress—that man," she faced and indicated the defendant.

The prosecuting attorney got upon his feet instantly.

"If the court please, here is a person who either is half-demented or she is the most important witness for the prosecution that we have yet discovered. I confess I do not know which. But I desire to place her on the stand. She is an old servant of Don Sagasto. So far as I knew or now know she was twenty miles from this city when Mrs. Hemperton was shot, but she declares that she knows the defendant did the shooting. She said the same thing to me once at the Sagasto rancho, but I attached no importance to her statement at that time because I believed it to be a physical impossibility that she should know anything about it. But she is here again today, without any knowledge on my part that she was coming. She has just repeated to me what she said at San Fernando, and she has added the extraordinary statement that she saw the shooting herself. There is evidently a mystery here, a most vital piece of evidence, or it is only a devoted old serving-woman's over-wrought imagination. I am frank to confess I suspect it is only the latter, but I propose to put her on the stand, if the court

please, and then we can quickly ascertain what there is in it."

Spectators in the rear of the court room had risen to their feet. An extraordinary thing was happening or was about to happen. Some observed that the defendant had paled, where his face could be seen above his black beard. Constancia and the don had involuntarily leaned forward in their sudden surprise and intense interest.

"I think the court should excuse the witness from being sworn," said Pollock. "It is probable that she does not understand the nature of an oath."

The court said: "My good woman, do you know what it means to be sworn; do you know how to take the oath?"

Tizza looked at the prosecuting attorney, not comprehending, then at Constancia.

"Tizza," said Pollock, explaining, "will you make an oath before God that what you are going to tell is true, all true?"

"Senor, I tell you that I see the senor there," pointing to Hemperton, "shoot my mistress. I tell the true thing I see."

"Very well, Tizza, take a seat in that chair," said Pollock, observing the judge's consent in his face and nod.

Nearly every spectator was now standing. The court ordered all to be seated, and to remain seated or leave the room.

"Now, Tizza, you say you know that Mr. Hemperton shot his wife. Why do you say so? How do you know it?"

"I see the senor shoot the Senora Hemperton."

"How could you see him do it? You live at San

Fernando. Mrs. Hemperton was killed at her home in this city."

"I come to the house the same day."

"The day the lady was shot?"

She nodded.

"Do you know what day that was, Tizza?"

"Christmas day. I come to the big house."

"Well, go on, Tizza! Tell all about it."

The prosecuting attorney was now palpitating with interest and wonder himself. Was it possible that a miracle was about to be performed? Would this weird, obscure old creature supply the final, connecting, all-essential, conclusive proof? It was incredible, but there she sat.

"I have not like the senor for all the time I know him. Many years ago I say to my mistress before she be his wife. The senor a bad man. How I know? My people know such things. I know such things. I think he bad, and sometime he do a bad thing. I know him here." She put her finger to her wrinkled forehead. "The day, the Christmas day, I feel something make me go to the big house. Senor Don Sagasto not be in the home. Senorita Constanca not be in the home. I be in the home myself only. I go come to the big house. No one be in it. I come to the top rooms. Then I am tired. Then I lay down. Then maybe I sleep. Then I hear the senor talk. He say bad thing to the senora. Then I hear him say 'I will kill you.' Then I go very easy to the door. Then I think I go in but I fear the senor kill me. Then I look in the room to a glass. The glass show the senor raise the arm, this way," she raised her hand as if aiming. "I go to scream but I cannot. Something make me not

scream. Then in the glass I see the senor shoot and I see the senora fall. Then I very much afraid because he be a very bad man. Then I go away very, very quick. I very sorry I see. I walk in the night to the rancho. That is the how I know the senor kill the senora, my lady."

During the recital the prosecuting attorney was scarcely less enthralled than the amazed spectators. Would the story be believed? Was it credible that this aged woman had without other motive than a witch's impulse made the long journey from the rancho to town, had entered the Hemperton home undetected by anyone, had actually seen, in the reflecting mirror, the murder of her mistress by defendant, then terror-smitten had hurried out, and walked, that ancient creature actually walked the twenty miles to the Sagasto rancho? Would an unsupported tale so improbable weigh with those twelve deliberative men?

It was the most dramatic incident in his young experience. It was a possible, but was it not a wholly improbable story?

Slowly, dexterously he led her back over the surprising narration, from the time she left the Sagasto home till she arrived back there again. He brought out important new facts. She had come by train. She had bought a ticket at San Fernando station. That much could probably be verified if it were true. She had walked back to the rancho. Why? There were no trains, she knew, when she wanted to return. Had she the strength to walk so far? She had walked many a time much farther. How old? She did not know, but the Senor Don Sagasto would know. She could walk much more

than twenty miles now. Her people could walk one hundred miles without a rest. She had seen the senor shoot the senora, she kept reiterating, and if taken to the house she could show how it was done and how she could see without being seen.

It was an improbable tale indeed, but it had produced a tremendous sensation. The jurymen were plainly impressed, Pollock could see, beyond any question.

Then the attorneys for the defense turned their batteries upon her. The ferocity of their questions and the hostility of their manner the old crone could not understand at all. It seemed to her that they acted as if they had not wanted her to tell how her mistress had been shot, as if they did not believe she was telling the truth, as if they did not desire to hear the truth. That was puzzling. The idea that anyone should desire to help Hemperton, the bad senor, to escape! She sometimes got so confused by their questions that she did not know how to reply, and very often did not reply at all, until the interrogations had been simplified to her understanding.

Why had she not screamed when Hemperton shot, why not make known to him or to Mrs. Hemperton her presence, why not inform the neighbors or servants, why had she never told Don Sagasto about it? She had feared Hemperton; she had regretted, evidently, having yielded to the impulse to go to the house and she had intended to keep the secret to herself. But when she heard the Senor Hemperton deny it all, and when she had heard the people about her say that the prisoner would not be punished, she could keep silent no longer. He was a bad man.

He must be punished. All the essentials of her story she clung to with unshaken tenacity and uniformity. She had hung around the court house since the trial began, but she had kept out of sight lest Don Sagasto might order her back to the rancho.

Manifestly to verify even a few essentials of Tizza's story would considerably prolong the case. The railway agent at San Fernando must be summoned and others found, if possible, who had seen her coming or going. Many new witnesses must be brought in. An entirely new and most momentous turn had been given to the case. Don Sagasto would have to testify as to the character and habits of the strange witness and indeed he never undertook in his life a task more to his liking.

Tizza, he said, had served in his family and in his father's before him for many years. She was a native, he understood, of a secluded valley in extreme southern Mexico near which his father, General Sagasto, had found her and saved her from assault when young. General Sagasto had protected the lives of her father and mother seventy years before. Tizza had never been known to tell an untruth in her long and faithful servitude. Her power of endurance had been marvelous, and her devotion absolute. He believed her entirely capable of walking from Fernando to the city. She and her mother had seemed to possess some astonishing and occult power—power he neither understood nor believed in, but some of her intuitions and prognostications had astounded him. In every way the don's testimony increased the probability of the truth of Tizza's, and opinion began to set in rather heavily against the accused.

The prosecution moved adjournment for three days to find new and necessary witnesses. The defense objected, but the postponement was granted.

The corroborative testimony strongly fortified the story that Tizza had volunteered, and placed the prosecution, if not in assurance of a convicting verdict, at least very much more in a way to yet secure a result than had been probable before the old servant thrust herself into the case. Then witnesses were examined and cross-examined, and inch by inch the struggle between the strong lawyers fought along. The complacent and almost contemptuous confidence of the defendant's attorneys had disappeared. They were confident, no doubt, but they had been forced into a far more cautious defense. The famous trial was drawing to a close. In a few hours more arguments for the prosecution would begin. Public interest had intensified rather than decreased. The possibility that Wayne Hemperton, one of the wealthiest and most esteemed men in the region, would be found guilty of uxoricide in a fit of rage, ascribable more to a quarrel growing out of difference in religious belief than any other discoverable reason, was generally conceded. The case had already furnished more than one unexpected sensation in the revelation of domestic discord where exemplary tranquility alone was popularly believed to reign, and in the volunteered and highly dramatic testimony of the old servant of the Sagastos. The wise ones prophesied there would be still more surprises. And not the least of the absorbing sequences in this surprising case would be the arraignment by the prosecuting attorney. So the public interest showed no sign of abating and the usually little-considered

court house retained its suddenly magnetized importance.

There was more to come, aye, more indeed, in the working out of the mournful drama of the Hemperton and the Sagasto families, and the shuttle of fate and the shuttle of life were moving fast through the web and the woof that held them, and its busy threads were weaving swift and strong around one life that felt then never a touch of their tightening strands.

The gray old don was again in his place, silent and grim observer, with that resolute purpose that justice should be done for the dead Felicia; and Constancia too, alert and keen and thoughtful, sitting close by her uncle, her hand sometimes resting upon his. And Hemperton, the accused, self-poised, watchful, pale, impassive.

There was a lull again, while the defendant's lawyers were conferring.

"If the court please, I would like to ask the defendant Hemperton a question," spoke Mr. Juror Craddenfield.

The defendant's lawyers ceased conferring and turned to look. The prosecuting attorney squared around in his chair, glanced sharply at Mr. Juror Craddenfield and then at the judge on the bench.

The accused, hearing a juror speak his name, faced that way too and waited.

"Very well," said the judge.

"I would like," said Mr. Juror Craddenfield, "to ask the defendant Hemperton where he was born!"

The leading counsel for the defense sprang to his feet.

"I would like to know, your honor," he exclaimed,

"what matter it makes to the juror where or when the defendant Hemperton was born? I object to the question and I object to the defendant answering."

"Your question is unusual, Mr. Craddenfield, but I see no reason why you should not ask it, or why the defendant should not reply. It does not seem, however, to have much bearing on this case," said the judge.

"I ask it, your honor, for a very good reason which may presently appear, a reason which if the answer be as I anticipate, may result in disqualifying me from further service as a juror in this case. Have I the court's permission to ask it?"

"Yes, you may," assented the court.

"Mr. Hemperton, where were you born?"

Mr. Juror Craddenfield leaned well forward toward the accused and put his right hand back of his ear to better catch the reply. He plumped the question with almost a snap, direct and quick.

"Am I supposed to answer?" Hemperton asked, addressing the court.

"Yes, I see no reason why you should not."

Hemperton afterward wondered why he did not mention another than the true place, but the question surprised him, quite.

"I was born in Binghampton, New York," he answered.

"Then, may it please the court," Mr. Juror Craddenfield exclaimed, rising in his juror's place, "I charge that the name of Hemperton is not the name of the accused at all! His name is Crenningway, and he is a distant relative of my wife's sister! His name is Jasper Crenningway! He is no more Hemperton, judge, than you are Hemperton; and

he is the man that folks back there have wanted for well on to twenty years!"

Mr. Juror Craddenfield had become somewhat excited, in the course of propounding his question and making his brief address to the astonished court room and to the pallid but still very well-composed defendant Hemperton. Mr. Juror Craddenfield had taken his right hand from behind his ear and had extended his right arm toward the defendant and was shaking a long and somewhat knotty finger accusingly at the man whom he declared to be one Crenningway and who had been born, as defendant himself admitted, in Binghampton, New York. And even when he had concluded, Mr. Juror Craddenfield did not then resume his seat. He was thoroughly interested now. The proceedings of the famous case of *The People vs. Hemperton*, charge of shooting his wife to death, had from the day the jury was sworn in and the prosecution presented and the defendant had taken a seat there before him, increased in interest for Mr. Juror Craddenfield with every passing hour. He looked long and intently at the defendant and then he turned away and rested his head on the palm of his hand, and he thought and he thought, and he scratched his bald head, and then he thought again. Then he looked a long, long time at the defendant and he said to himself: "Great God! can it really be?"

The days they came and the days they went, and the famous case with the fate of this man with the black, thick beard fought on and on, and still Mr. Juror Craddenfield was struggling with a memory, and digging 'up connecting things out of the dusty past where many dusty and forgotten things were

better let remain forgotten, particularly when famous cases, such as that of *The People vs. Hemperton*, charge of shooting his wife to death, are at bar.

The more that Mr. Juror Craddenfield observed defendant Hemperton and the more the juror sent his sharp old mind diving after fragments of things buried but not forgotten in the juror's past, the more all-absorbing and all-possessing the conviction grew to be, till at last Mr. Juror Craddenfield reached the point where he had to ask a question of defendant Hemperton, or explode.

Thus it came about that Mr. Juror Craddenfield stood there in his place in the jury box shaking his finger accusingly at defendant Hemperton, a fresh and forbidding nemesis projected into the forces that were gathering around the man on trial for his life.

Again spectators had been lifted to their feet by uncontrollable interest, and again the judge presiding ordered them down to the benches. The strain of this extraordinary trial was becoming extreme and harrowing. No comparable experience had ever come within the range of a man among them.

"Your honor, I protest, and I ask that the court severely reprimand this juror. It is an act unprecedented in all my experience at the bar, and I am sure your honor never saw anything like it. The juror is showing such feeling against the defendant that we shall be compelled to suspend the case and try it over again unless this man can be suppressed!"

The advocate for Hemperton was both angry and alarmed. The defendant himself was struggling to preserve the self-composure which the unexpected nemesic ascription was threatening to embreach.

And all this time the prosecuting attorney was not showing the elation that his sympathizers and all observers had looked for after this sudden accession of support for his side of the case. Instead of exulting he sat absorbedly regarding the defendant, inarticulately dreading developments.

But Mr. Juror Craddenfield was now aroused. Before the presiding judge could reply to Hemperton's lawyer, before he could act upon the attorney's suggestion, Mr. Juror Craddenfield irrupted again out of the very fulness of his long-accumulating reservoir of feeling, wrath and excitement.

"That's not all, your honor! And now that I've got started I'm going to finish what I have to say!"

The defendant's lawyer was on his feet again, frantically appealing to the court to stop the incriminating flow of Juror Craddenfield's indictment.

The judge leaned forward and opened his lips to speak. But Mr. Juror Craddenfield held the floor and proposed to keep it.

"That man Crenningway," he excitedly shouted, shaking his fist and poking that malefic finger at Hemperton, "that man Crenningway ran away and abandoned his young and devoted wife and son, a child but a few years old, and nobody ever heard of him again. The woman has been dead only a few years, but the son is somewhere in the west."

There was no stopping Mr. Juror Craddenfield now. Nobody except the defendant and the defendant's lawyers wanted to stop him.

But the judge had raised his hand commandingly, and Juror Craddenfield paused. At least he had relieved his feelings. He was not altogether sure that he had not exposed himself in some way to the

censure of the court. It might be contempt, but he didn't care. It was true and he was bound to have it out."

"Mr. Craddenfield, you have made a fearful accusation against the defendant. If it be true, then you know the man and have too much feeling against him to qualify you to remain as a juror in this case," said the judge, when at last the juror paused. "You may be making a terrible mistake, Mr. Craddenfield. You would much better be careful before you make such an accusation and before you interrupt the proceedings of a trial as important as this. If what you say can be shown to be true, it must be proven now, before the trial proceeds. How can you be so sure of what you have charged?"

"Lord alive! judge, I knew that man nigh twenty years ago! He had no beard in those days. The beard fooled me a long time. Will he deny that what I say is true?" Mr. Juror Craddenfield asked, swinging his fierce scrutiny full into the constricted and ashen face of the accused.

The silence of an African desert fell upon that court room. Men were gripping tight and fast the backs of benches in front of them, and women were on the verge of hysteria.

The impassiveness of the defendant was almost shattered, but not quite.

"The juror is very much mistaken," he said slowly, in a voice distinct but almost beyond control. The heavy black beard concealed the lips that were pinched and bloodless now.

"It is the truth and he knows it!" again shouted the juror. "His name is Jasper Crenningway. His wife thought he was dead, after five years, and

married again. She changed the name of the boy to Pollock, the name of the man she married."

Then Mr. Juror Craddenfield had a revelation, and it drove all the blood from his face and almost made his heart itself stand still.

"Pollock. Why—Mr. Prosecuting Attorney! That's your name—Marston Pollock. By God! young man, *you are the defendant's son!*"

The apotheosis of emotion that enthralled the court room and reached even to the groups beyond had yet to rise still higher under the eventuation of forces still in play. Already women were softly sobbing, and the faces of men were tense. Such stress of feeling could not long endure. Reaction must presently set in. The climax of this convulsing drama must be forthcoming soon. But the concentration of interest had shifted, in the very instant of Juror Craddenfield's final exclamation, from the grave and still impassive defendant to the prosecuting attorney himself. Upon him, hitherto the chief-directing mind in the thrilling trial, a very paralysis of action now descended. The direction of affairs had passed, for a time at least, completely from his hands. No longer was he the compelling motive-power inspiring the operation of the engines of Justice speeding a transgressor to punishment, but himself a victim of circumstance hopelessly embran-gled in the unreversible machinery of this event, powerless to stop the mutilating cogs that were grinding even unsuspecting him along with their other grist of aching souls.

While Mr. Juror Craddenfield's extraordinary revelations were forthcoming, the prosecuting attorney fixed his eyes on defendant Hemperton and scarcely

of his own volition, but more with the manner of a man compelled by a force beyond his ken, slowly arose and stood there straight and stonily before him.

A moment of Arctic silence came when Juror Craddenfield had said his say, and in those harrowing seconds all the mystery of Pollock's fatherless youth unrolled its explanations to his now comprehending mind.

"You!" he cried, not loudly, but with the muffled undertone of incredulous amaze and horror, as he leaned toward Hemperton and pointed an interrogating peremptory finger at the stolid, bearded face.

"You! *my* father?"

Then slowly he turned, dropped with the manner of a person stricken into his chair, folded his arms upon the table and wearily hid his face. Others might clamor for the proof of it, but no other proof was needful to him after that flashlight of retrospect and that searching, all-illuminating scrutiny of the face before him that could not raise its fearing eyes to meet his son. Back into the days of his babyhood and earliest boyhood he commissioned his memory to find for him the face and the voice of the father he had barely known and then forgot, and faithful memory found them out and brought the face and the voice to the son again, to see and to hear and to know.

Mr. Juror Craddenfield stepped from the jury box down into the lawyers' forum and strode to where Hemperton sat. Then, bayed at last, but still mastering the palsy of his disconcertedness and fear, the defendant sprang to his feet and with a well-put show of anger shook his fist in the face of Cradden-

field. "You are an infernal old liar!" he shouted. "There is not a single word of truth in all you say! I demand protection of this court, your honor," facing the judge and with something like defiance and indignation restoring his more normal expression.

The whole dramatic scene had been so swiftly acted, and had swept the court and bar and people into a common whirlpool of such intensity of emotion and curiosity that the court himself had quite lost his bearings in the current, but promptly he repossessed himself.

"Mr. Craddenfield, your statements are very surprising, indeed, but it will go hard with you if you have made a mistake. I certainly had no idea that you proposed to go so far when I permitted you to ask one simple question. What possible proof can you produce to sustain your grave accusation?"

"I cannot be mistaken, your honor! I know too much about the man and have seen him too many times in years past to be mistaken now. If this defendant Hemperton is not Jasper Crenningway then he has no scar on his jaw. Let the defendant permit the court, or any one the court may name, to examine under his bushy beard. If there is no scar on the left jaw then I have made a mistake and will most humbly apologize. If the scar is there, then I absolutely know this man is Jasper Crenningway, deserter of his wife and son."

"Mr. Hemperton, are you willing to permit an examination to be made, as Mr. Craddenfield suggests?"

Hemperton replied not instantly. He was groping for command of his voice. "Your honor," he exclaimed, "this is folly. It is worse, it is an out-

rage! I appeal to my attorneys and to the court to put a stop to it once and for all. My position here is deplorable enough without my being subjected to the insults and embarrassment of this crazy and mistaken juror."

"You can settle the matter very quickly, Mr. Hemperton. If the mark of identification which Mr. Craddenfield speaks of is not on your face, you will be entirely relieved of further embarrassment, and I shall feel much disposed to take some rather severe action respecting the accusing juror. I advise you, Mr. Hemperton, to hasten this disagreeable matter to a conclusion."

Both of Hemperton's lawyers were on their feet striving to break in with a plea.

"If the court please, we most emphatically object to this whole proceeding as insulting and outrageous and wholly extraneous. It has no place nor part in the trial of the defendant, and the court should never have permitted it to occur. We move, your honor, that the case be suspended here and now and that a new jury be impaneled. The attitude of this crazy juror, Craddenfield, has utterly disqualified him from further sitting in this trial."

"I admit that the experience is most extraordinary, Mr. Cranston," said the court, addressing the defendant's leading counsel. "I had no idea of any such an accusation being projected into the case when I gave Mr. Craddenfield permission to ask what seemed to be a harmless question. If Mr. Hemperton is not Mr. Hemperton, but if he is really Jasper Crenningway, then I am somewhat in doubt as to the course which the court should follow. I will decide as to that when we settle this matter of identity. I

strongly suspect that the juror is mistaken, however, in which case my duty will be very clear. Mr. Hemperton, your unwillingness or refusal to permit examination as to the existence or non-existence of the scar will militate against you, necessarily. Your refusal will not of itself prove the existence of the scar, but the inference will be unavoidable that it is there. If it is there the embarrassment of your previous plight will be much increased. If it is not there you will be entitled to the juror's humble apology, in which the court will feel very much like joining. What is your decision?"

With dry lips and with a voice he now barely commanded, the defendant said: "Very well, let the prosecuting attorney himself examine."

The prosecuting attorney raised his head, turned a full and searching gaze into the eyes of the defendant for a few seconds, then slowly shook his head.

"No," he said, "I cannot!"

"Mr. Craddenfield, do so yourself, with the defendant's permission," said the court.

"Yes," assented Hemperton, scarcely audible.

Juror Craddenfield took two or three steps toward the defendant, regarding him with a nemesic and almost maliciously vindictive expression of his little snappy eyes.

Then Hemperton raised his hands with palms toward the juror, inclined his head well down upon his chest, and exclaimed in a voice utterly despairing and broken:

"No! No! Keep away! Keep away! I can't do it!" and dropped limply and undone into his chair.

That was the end. Something like a subdued hiss arose from among the crowded benches, and the

presiding judge himself blew a sonorous blast into his handkerchief, rested his forehead on his hand a few seconds, and then in straining necessity for relief arose, paced two or three times across the judicial dais, resumed his chair and vigorously rubbed his spectacles with his kerchief.

More than a full minute elapsed while the court and the bar were readjusting themselves after the reaction.

And what of Don Sagasto? Through all the intense and thrilling period, from the quiet request of Mr. Juror Craddenfield for permission to address a question to defendant Hemperton, to defendant Hemperton's collapsing confession that Juror Craddenfield had in reality penetrated the identity he had so perfectly concealed for almost twenty years, the gray old don gripped tightly on the arms of his chair. People were too much absorbed in the swift eventuation of this dramatic scene to observe the maleficent, menacing flame gleaming from the don's fixed and piercing eyes. He saw neither judge nor juror, the gaping, eager crowd beyond the bar nor the advocates fighting for advantage, nor yet his niece Constancia, companion and comforter of his grief; he heard not the comment from the bench nor the protests of the defendant's attorneys, but heard he well indeed every syllable of the fatal, fateful revelation that Mr. Juror Craddenfield had made, proclaiming the complete and crowning dishonor of his house and name, this final, this inconceivable and irreparable wrong that this man Hemperton had heaped upon the dead Felicia. And when Hemperton, shielding with protesting palms the identifying scar that branded him a bigamist and a wife-deserter,

sank confessing and overwhelmed into his prisoner's chair, then the don felt the icy and crunching fingers of his own sure doom lay hold upon his heart, and he knew the hour for his vengeance for the sacred dead had come.

He arose unsteadily, reached to his hip and leveled his arm. The prosecuting attorney, between the don and the defendant, caught the unfamiliar stir and whirled to strike the hand of the senor as a bullet sped high to the wall beyond. The don moved a step or two with hands upraised and groping for the throat of the transgressor, but gently they restrained him, the prosecuting attorney and another, while Constancia fondled his palsied and chilling hand in hers and called him dear old Uncle Tobal, and soothed him and kissed him, and said they would now go home together. And home they went, the stricken old don and his loving niece, out and away from that harrowing drama of a man's great sin and a woman's dishonor; but they bore the don hence, paralyzed and unavenged and helplessly stammering a mumbled imprecation; they bore him, the last Sagasto of his ancient and noble house.

CHAPTER XXII

A Son's Way

BRIGHT rays from the study lamp of Father Leon glinted across the gray skull, polished by much handling, that still performed its monitory functions for the priest. The light shone also upon an open but unread book on Father Leon's knee. The priest had begun to read, but the demand upon his thought by events still recent was too peremptory to be superceded by any other theme. The priest's head rested on his palms and his eyes were closed, but he was not asleep. He was thinking of the denouement of the half-tried case of *The People vs. Hemperton*. He was wondering if yet another life was to be sacrificed in the entailing wreckage of this one man's transgressions. He was wondering if the lightning that had begun to play fitfully around the heads of those dear friends of his, when Hemperton uttered his first little sarcasms at the expense of Felicia's devotion to her church, had not yet expended the force of the current that had lashed and thrashed its smiting and so deadly way. He was wondering why in the providence of God, to whose humble vicarship he had consecrated his life, such inscrutable things must come to pass. He was wondering why the path of virtue had been made so narrow and was

so bestrewn with stones, and why the avenue of wrong-doing was so broad and so easy to travel; why the human heart with its outreach and upreach, its instinctive craving for contentment and happiness, its hunger that is never satisfied, its thirst that is never quenched, should be so beset with opposition to its virtuous courses and so assailed by temptations to consort with evil. If his own priestly strength had been so narrowly adequate under the contending forces of his fierce desire, fortified as he was by oath and vow and sacred circumstance and lofty endeavor, what wonder if the masses of men—unfortified by high resolve, discouraged by sordid and delevitating conditions and unsupported by consecration deliberate and binding as his—should stray easily into the thistled field of craft and crime and evil-doing and fall a ready prey to the passions and pitfalls of human nature.

The dark and melancholy life-lines of the man whose uncompleted trial he had attended were altogether the most appalling and unaccountable in all his experience. The petty influences that were confided for his indulgence and reprimand, through his priestly office, were pale, inconsequential foibles when set in frame for cognizance and note beside the splotchy reds and blacks of the bigamist and the murderer who had lived and comported himself for twenty years among them all as a man of conscience, heart and uprightness.

It was not jealousy, but a cankered, cancerous memory that had wrought the death of Felicia, the priest now knew. The mystery of that pitiful taking-off had never been explained to the mind of **Father Leon** until the revelation of the earlier crime

made clear the cause. The brooding, silent, secret corroding of a mind diseased by this encysted, putrescent remorse had worked a fermentation in a character that no doubt strove, in its mistaken way, toward a regenerate standard of living.

The door bell tinkled, and directly a woman clad in the habit of a sister of mercy came into the priest's study. Father Leon arose and with the deference of a courtier took her hand and led her to a seat.

"Sister Ysabel, I am glad to see you. I have sent for you because I wish to ask you to be particularly watchful of our patient tonight. Doctor Widner tells me these will be the crucial hours. I told him that no one might so safely be entrusted with the care of the sick man on such a night as you."

"Father, you are much too kind; but I will not close my eyes one moment all night."

"How is Senorita Constancia this evening, Sister Ysabel?"

"Grieving, father, but courageous. You know the blood."

"Yes, the dear old senor's people were a strong-hearted race indeed."

After giving Sister Ysabel explicit instructions to have him called if any change for the worse developed in young Pollock before morning, the priest bade her good-night.

Sister Ysabel she had become through the helpfulness of the priest, her babe surviving but a few hours, and the fatal accident to Ruiz following soon after. Neither the don nor Felicia knew, so adroitly had Father Leon managed to save their pride. And the salvation of Ysabel was but one in the long catalogue of the good priest's practical Christian ministrations.

He had no coadjutor now since the loss of Felicia, but he went his noble, silent way, succoring, ministering, comforting as before—thinking ever of Felicia and forever adoring.

The prosecuting attorney was indeed very ill. His high-strung organization, keyed to the very limit by months of incessant toil and preparation over the celebrated case of *The People vs. Hemperton*, completely over-played upon by the extraordinary strain and experiences attending the trial, had snapped under the stroke of the revelation of a sonship thus made known, and a fever had prostrated him the very night of the day that the defendant had collapsed.

The presiding judge, himself desiring delay for legal pilotage through a labyrinth so perplexing and unheard-of, continued the case pending the convalescence of the prosecuting attorney.

Sister Ysabel's patient passed the crucial night with no unfavorable symptoms, and the following morning his physician declared that Pollock would soon be on his feet.

With the subsidence of the fever Pollock began to rearrange his plans. It would be impossible for him to proceed with the prosecution. However much he might be actuated by a sense of duty, and by his oath as a public prosecuting attorney, it was unthinkable that he should continue to in any way participate in the trial of his father. *His father!* From the far off past of his very earliest childhood he invoked again the lineaments that had been but imperfectly affixed upon his mind. Barely could he remember, and no more, the brief comings and goings of the father who had vanished suddenly and

unexplainedly out of his little life. He could remember more of his mother's grief, and he recalled now how mistily he had comprehended then; and how years afterwards, while he was yet but a little boy they had told him that his other papa had perished, and there was a new father who did not disappear so suddenly, but who died when Marston was quite a lad. Then they had called him not Marston Crenningway any longer, but Marston Pollock, for his new father, and the other identity had been all but obliterated from his recollection.

There must be a day for speech between them—the father and the son that had been happier fatherless; a day for speech of things better left unsaid. It must be faced, of course, but he would pass it over now. It were better not dwelt upon. He had not yet adjusted himself to the incredible and unwelcome and altogether tragic fact of the fatherhood and the filialty. He would do what must be done, when he had resolved the situation into its simple component parts—when he quite understood what was best to do.

But Constancia! There was where his real grief would lie! That was the supreme test on his manhood's strength. Of course he must give her up. Of course he must close the doors of his heart to that dear joy and love forever. Not for the son of such a father was a woman such as she! Loving much, he dipped himself deep into the sweet possibility that Constancia might decline to permit that fatherhood of unworth so unspeakable, that sonship so unknowing when he wooed, to interject its misshapen self between them. Perhaps! Perhaps her love might stand the test! But there could, indeed, be no perhaps for him. Constancia might in the

plenitude of her love and her sympathy waive the indisputable sufficiency for her release; but he, the son and the lover, could not accept. There would be no possible, no thinkable, alternative. There was but one and only way. He must and he would release her. For her own happiness he must make her see how impossible that she should waive it, even if she so desired. To presume that a woman so beautiful—so proud, of sires so noble, of blood so undefiled—could undertake wifeship with a name so blemished and so dishonored, her own so illustrious and so clean, was monstrous! Receding now, forever the glorious prospect of Constancia's love! Vanishing! Vanishing! Vanishing now the radiant and surpassing joy that his manhood's love and hope and ambition had projected for them twain!

Not even the physician himself had been as constant as Judge Brecknell at the sick bed, and through this stanch old friend and by Sister Ysabel, Constancia had the promptest information of her lover's condition.

The judge, made executor by the will of Don Sagasto, had taken over the full management of the estate for Constancia whose *de facto* uncle and father he constituted himself. He had offered Constancia a home in his house, his wife gladly concurring, but Constancia desired for the present to remain in the Hemperton home if she could find a suitable companion. Whereupon the judge and Father Leon consulted, and at the instance of the priest Sister Ysabel had been suggested; and thus it came about that Constancia knew the rise and fall of the fever that was clutching with hot fingers for another victim of Hemperton's transgression.

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Meantime, while strength was returning, the prosecuting attorney was thinking much upon the situation that must confront him directly he should be able to resume the trial. Of course he could no longer conduct the prosecution. That was quite too much to expect of flesh and blood. It would wholly contravene nature that he, the son, should continue the exercise of a duty that would send the father to imprisonment for life—or worse. He could withdraw from the case, and the court would no doubt excuse him, under the extraordinary circumstances. He could even resign his office, and pass the prosecution to another. The man could not escape—this man who was his father; he would be convicted beyond any question, now. He might have failed of conviction through disagreement of the jury had not that other, that exhumed past been revealed and confessed. That had made conviction almost inevitable; but he, the son, must not, could not, would not be the instrument. Bad man as the defendant was, he, the prosecuting attorney, was nevertheless the son, and all thought of his participation must be dismissed.

But would it suffice to merely shift the instrumentality? Should he, the son, be the passive spectator of his father's final and complete undoing, his conviction, his imprisonment perhaps for life, possibly his—execution! If he were to resign his office to undertake the defense? People would applaud, but the applauding was not to be thought about. There was but one standard for measurement of the rightness or the wrongness of his course—his own conscience; more, his sonship. But any defense, he was now sure, would be limping and

insufficient. Nothing—no flight of eloquence, not even the dramatic spectacle of a son pleading for a father's life—could avail now over all that had been established. The most able defense would fall before that abject and shrinking figure, that spectacle of the man interposing his hands between those searching fingers of Juror Craddenfield and the thick beard that hid the branding evidence of that long concealment and duplicity. Defense would not avail! Defense against that crushing, collapsing confession would be utterly impotent.

But suppose the defendant should escape? *Escape?* The force of that electrifying inspiration lifted the convalescent to his feet and sent him striding even in his weakness to and fro. Escape! If he should! If he could! Could? He must! The alternative was not to be debated. Pollock's was a decisive character, and his resolution was quick and positive.

A day or so after he sent a message for Dester to come—Dester whose brother Lawyer Pollock had extricated from a serious plight a year before. Dester who swore unforgetting gratitude.

"Dester, I want you to do a thing for me that will cost you your present position, but I will provide for you. You've got to let Mr. Hemperton escape! I'll tell you how, and I'll give you one thousand dollars, enough to start you in business."

Dester softly whistled, walked to the window, looked out, went three times across the room with his hands in his pockets and his head bended.

"I'll do it—for you!"

"I knew it! Of course you will do it." Pause.

"Dester!"

"Well, sir."

"You know why I ask this—you know who this Mr. Hemperton is, I suppose?"

"Yes, he's you—,"

"Well, never mind, since you know, Dester." Another pause.

"Dester, when the time comes, and I'll notify you, you will take him in a closed carriage at night, upon his request, to get some important papers at his house. That's all I shall know, or you. Something will happen. He will lock you in the room—or something. There will be a great hubbub, of course, and probably you will be dismissed for carelessness. I will give you one thousand dollars the next day." Pause. "You will do it, Dester?"

"I will do it." And Dester gave his hand and his steady gray eye.

When the prosecuting attorney quite got his legs again, he did not go at once to see the prisoner. He did not yet feel equal to what he knew would be an exhausting draft upon his but partially recuperated vitality. He meant that there should be but one interview, and it might be painful and trying; and he wanted to be at his best, or nearly so. Possibly some people might think that he should melt and be forgiving; but it could never be. Such a fatherhood so revealed absolved him, he reasoned, from every obligation, even from the very matter he had arranged with Dester.

One morning, a week after he had got about, he went to the jail. He was conducted to Hemperton's apartment about ten o'clock. Now, Hemperton, though a bad man was by no means a weak one. The surprises of the trial had carried by sheer assault the approaches to his poise and self-control,

which he had thought the twenty years test had calcined and fortified beyond all possible inroads of emotion or any sortie of the most startling incident. But the trial over, he had re-encased himself in his sheath of imperturbability. Inwardly, the hull of his hope and confidence had been honeycombed with blowholes by the broadsides of Juror Craddenfield, but he had wrapped the armor of his practiced reserve and composure around his outward demeanor and he was almost the immobile Hemperton of his most successful days. Almost, but not quite. The prosecuting attorney could detect the difference. The assertive and almost imperious expression of the eyes was gone, and the look of them was cold and harrowed; but still the look of a fighting man who had been driven to bay, yet in whom were some good fights remaining. The red light of battle was in them—the fearing of the hunted—but the preparedness for combat as well, the supreme law of self-preservation asserting itself. The regular visitations of old friends and business associates, who had made bearable his incarceration before the trial, had ceased; and this inattention hit him harder, a direct thrust at his self-love, and made him suffer even more than the unmasking of him by Juror Craddenfield.

“The prosecuting attorney to see you, Mr. Hemperton,” announced the deputy.

The prisoner was reading when Pollock appeared. He promptly closed the book, took a step toward the visitor and stood regarding him fixedly, his hands clasped behind his back, his head slightly inclined. The men gazed penetratingly into each other's eyes during some seconds.

"Well," said the prosecuting attorney.

"Well," said the prisoner, after a pause. "You scarcely expected to find your father thus, if you ever found him at all, I suppose?" he continued.

"Long ago I ceased to consider the possibility of finding him. I suggest that we engage in no discussion of the past or of might-have-beens. It would be mutually painful and unprofitable. There are certain things to be done. I suppose you understand that you are almost sure to be convicted?"

"Possibly."

"Positively!"

"It does not follow."

"It is certain!"

"I do not think so. I have fought out of some tight places."

"In business, perhaps, but never were you in such an extremity as this."

"It might be a pleasanter circumstance, I confess. Shall you continue to conduct the prosecution?"

The prosecuting attorney ignored the question. "You shall be given an opportunity to escape," he said. "You must go. You must leave the country with all possible dispatch."

The fighter in Hemperton was not yet vanquished. "I may prefer to remain."

"I am very sorry. I wish from the bottom of my heart that you might, but that cannot be. You must go!"

"That may not be so easy."

"It shall be made possible. But first you will make complete restitution of all the Sagasto property. You will forgive the mortgage on the Sagasto rancho—the entire debt! You will make over to Don Sagas-

to's niece all the property that you acquired through Mrs. Hemperton. Such other property as you may possess will be held in trust by me for your benefit, and its disposition will be at your future pleasure."

"Suppose I conclude to take my chances with another trial?"

"You cannot so conclude."

"You do not appear to be rejoiced to see me."

"The occasion can scarcely be called a joyful one."

"You are not disposed to be son-like."

"You have not been fatherly. And your taunt is out of place in view of the provision I am making for your escape. I must remind you that reminiscence and sarcasm and all sentiment are sadly ill-timed between you and me. I am not even going to ask the useless question why you have done all this. You are about to be brought again to trial for your life. Circumstances are now overwhelmingly against you. I am not son enough to rejoice over having discovered such a father, but I am son enough to desire to save you from the consequences of this trial. And you must go! I shall have to ask you to read and sign these papers."

The prisoner read. One was a complete release of all mortgages on the Sagasto property, the other a deed of trust to Pollock.

"Do I understand that you guarantee my escape?"

"I will guarantee that you shall escape from this place and from custody, but you must manage the rest yourself."

"You are taking chances."

"I prefer to take chances rather than to be the son of a convict."

"You speak with much plainness."

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"There is no need for fine or soft phrasing between you and me, now."

"I would like to ask one question."

"Well."

"When did my—your—mother die?"

"I must be excused from answering. You have forfeited the right to know."

The prisoner lowered his eyes and inclined his head, deliberately. He paced several times to and fro. Then he seated himself at a table, spread the papers before him and rested his forehead on both palms. When he looked at the prosecuting attorney, Pollock was not seeing him, but his gaze, mournful yet resolute, was through the window and far beyond.

Hemperton signed the papers, arose and handed them to Pollock. "That is all, I believe," he said. "When shall I—when will the rest take place?"

"In a few days. I shall come once more to bring you money, but for no conversation. You will ask Dester, the night man, any day within a week after three days hence to conduct you in a closed carriage to your residence to obtain some papers. Your own ingenuity must suggest what to do when you are in the house. The night train for Arizona and Mexico will be suitable for your purpose, but a freight will be better still. Of course you will change your clothes and shave. But I must leave details to your own devising."

"I suppose it is too much to expect you to forgive me."

"It is rather late and quite unnecessary to go into that, don't you think?" somewhat sadly.

"No doubt, as you say, it is rather late! You are doing a very handsome thing. I would like to shake hands."

"Goodby, Mr. Crenningway," extending his hand.

"Goodby, Mr. Pollock."

Within a week the public knew the final sensation in this case of *The People vs. Hemperton*, so crowded with extraordinary incidents. The defendant prisoner had escaped. Night-jailor Dester was responsible. The night before he had taken Hemperton in a closed carriage to the prisoner's residence to obtain certain important papers. It was a stretch of official discretion quite unjustifiable and would probably cause the deputy's quick dismissal. While Hemperton was busy at his desk deputy Dester remained with him on guard. Hemperton asked permission to step to an adjoining dressing-room. There the deputy erred. He should have followed, but over-trusting Hemperton's pledge and manner he had permitted the prisoner to disappear for a minute, and that minute was likely to continue for the rest of Hemperton's life. Hemperton had swiftly closed the door, locked the deputy in, and left the house by the back way. The *Senorita Sagasto* happened not to be in at that particular hour. The night was dark, and Hemperton had a fair advantage in time. He should be easily retaken, the papers said, because his features were well-known. But he was not, neither that day nor the following nor thereafter. Night and a shaved face and disguising garments favored him. He went not to the station where he might be recognized, but slunk around freight yards till he concealed himself, with soiled hands and face and clothes, in an outgoing car; and thus with a price upon his head twenty-four hours later, he eluded detection and

reached an obscure station in Arizona, where he out-fitted as a miner and went on into the shelter of Mexico.

Not until a week had passed did the prosecuting attorney's extreme anxiety wear away, but when the sixth day had gone he knew that recapture was improbable.

CHAPTER XXIII

Father Leon Goes on a Journey

WITHIN a few hours after the escape of Hemperton became known Father Leon called at the palace of the bishop. "Your lordship," he said, "I have come to beg of you the privilege of absenting myself from my parish duties for several weeks."

The bishop was surprised. "There would appear to be no reason why you may not, father. What is the purpose, if I may be permitted to inquire?"

"Your lordship, I am exceedingly weary. For long I have been combating extreme lassitude of mind and body. I am sorely in need of recuperation."

The good bishop was fully sensible of the faithful and achieving service of his masterful assistant, and he was at once disposed to favor him.

"Shall you go far, father?"

"I shall travel much, your lordship."

"When would you wish your leave of absence to begin?"

"At once, if it please your lordship."

"At once, my dear friend?"

"If it please your lordship. I may go now as well as later. It is best that I go immediately."

"I am too sensible of the church's obligation to

your fidelity, my dear companion and assistant, to interpose the slightest objection to so reasonable a request. Therefore I am pleased to say to you, go Father Leon, and go today if you desire. I will provide for the temporary vacancy. Remain as long as you think best, loyal exemplar of the faith, and I pray God you may derive all the benefit you seek. God be with you everywhere and guide you safely back to us again!"

"I thank your lordship most sincerely."

The bishop was well aware that in the death of Mrs. Hemperton the priest had suffered a most poignant grief. Never suspecting the heart-history of Father Leon, the bishop understood, nevertheless, something of the nature of the unusual and sympathetic friendship that had endured between Mrs. Hemperton and the priest. He understood that the tragic circumstance of her death, together with the consuming strain of the trial of Hemperton, must have preyed painfully upon the finely sensitized organization of the priest. He knew that for many years the relation which Father Leon had sustained to the Hempertons was almost that of near kinship. The shock of the tragedy must have been extreme, the bishop reflected, and the priest's desire to escape for a time from mournful associations was reasonable. The bishop did not observe during the interview, but afterward he recalled that Father Leon had seemed unnaturally taciturn and abstracted. Cheerfulness was a dominant trait in the priest. This unfamiliar abstractedness must indicate a deeply grieving and a weary mind. Almost the sympathetic bishop was solicitous as he reflected upon the marked change in his friend, and he went to the door and

looked down the street half minded to call him back for friendly counsel, but Father Leon was not within vision.

Father Leon put the simple affairs of his parish house in order, bade his housekeeper say that he had gone on a journey in search of much-needed rest, and directed that she remain until he should return, be that few or many weeks. And then he went away. He was setting out upon long and tortuous wanderings, he believed. Whither his objective might lead him or when he might return, whether he should ever again stand before that familiar altar and resume his invocations and utter again his benedictions upon the reverent heads of his beloved and loving people, was beyond his present power to foretell. He was prepared for far-reaching life changes. He was so resolute in this new purpose that he would not falter before any alternative. He was going on a far and uncertain journey, a holy quest, a kind of impersonal yet self-appointed crusade, into regions that were unfamiliar, upon a consecrated mission. He might be able to conclude it soon, or it might require him to persist in it for a then wholly unanticipated period. He had arrived at that fixedness of resolution and self-dedication where he would unhesitatingly devote the remainder of his life, if necessary, to the fulfilment of his purpose. He was setting out to find Wayne Hemperton. He proposed to find him even if to do so should require the sacrifice of his priestly career. He would pursue that quest no matter where or to what wanderings it might lead him. There might be incertitude as to time but not as to the outcome. And when at last he should come upon him, when

he and this very Caliban of a Sadducee, who had tormented the wife-happiness out of his faithful co-mate, should stand face to face he, valiant and unquestioning churchman though he was, would administer retributive justice upon that arch-transgressor; retributive justice, aye! and avenging justice as well, which the tardy law of the land had been circumvented from imposing by that unaccountable escape—retributive for the law, avenging for himself and for the don—and for her, most of all. Irrevocably he had committed himself to find the fugitive. When or where or how he did not know, and when or where or how was of in consequence. But find him he would, whether in the course of days or weeks or years or at the end of a lifetime, it would be done.

When his dear parishioner and companion had been struck down the priest's mind had recoiled from believing that Hemperton had shot her. Even with the ineffaceable photograph of Hemperton's insensate accusation, and that upraised poinard caustizing conviction in upon him, still the priest refused to accept the overwhelming truth. He fought persistently away from that conclusion. Notwithstanding the inexplicable tragedy of that morning hour, when Hemperton snatched the cross from the hand upraised in its holy office of peace, the priest still clung to the hope that in some way, sometime, Hemperton's normal equilibrium would eventually supervene and disentangle the seemingly inextricable illaqueation into which he had intricated their lives. And when Felicia fell the priest argued himself away, month after month, from the conclusion that the final tragedy was but a culmination of Hemperton's years of morbid brooding over an

imaginary grievance. Then during the long period between the arrest and the trial he had reluctantly brought himself almost to the acceptance of the prosecuting attorney's view and to Don Sagasto's unshakable conviction — that there had been more years of inharmony between the pair than even himself or the don had suspected; and that the brave Felicia had concealed her unhappiness, not exposing it even in her final extremity; and that Hemperton in uttermost causelessness of rage, provoked they would never know by what, had been wrenched from the moorings of normality.

When the trial opened the priest had about reached the point where he was prepared to believe anything. The defense's theory, based on Hemperton's account and on Felicia's declaration of accident, was finally rejected by Father Leon because of his knowledge of Mrs. Hemperton's habits of mind and action. He had no recollection of having heard her refer in all her life to the possession of a revolver. And why should she move it or even look at it, much less handle it, on that Christmas afternoon, directly having returned from an apparently agreeable drive with her husband? No, the theory of accidentally self-inflicted injury would not stand.

Then, when the horrifying revelation made by Juror Craddenfield enveloped them in that supreme obmutescence,—then the priest understood all the hitherto not-understandable past. Curiously enough he did not shrink from thinking about that as he had from accepting the theory that Hemperton had killed his wife, because that pitiful mystery had been finally dissolved, and thereupon his mind had instantly

cemented its resolutions. Swift and arrowy he saw through to the very end and recognized and accepted his duty. Had he not seen the don defy the restraint of the court room and palsiedly rise to avenge the dishonor of his house; had he not seen him borne paralyzed and still unavenged from that tribunal, and had he not assisted in the old man's mournful home-going? Then and there as they were supporting his afflicted friend away the priest had had revealed unto him his whole illumine pathway—to avenge the double crime visited upon the don's daughter, and last of all the death of Sagasto himself in the very utterness of grief. The vengeance that Sagasto had attempted he, Father Leon, would reundertake and complete, or he would be a vicar no more. He would wait as the don had waited for the slow incertitude of the law. There was to be another trial, because of the disqualifying of Juror Craddenfield. If the other trial failed to impose adequate punishment—and that could be only the death penalty—then the priest must dedicate himself to be the avenger. He did not for a single hour reason about it nor argue himself into it. The resolution was instantly and for all time fixed. All sense of his own personality and his relation to his parish work was lost sight of. He indulged in no reflections as to consequences to himself or to his career. Himself and his career were become utterly inconsequential in the light of the sacred trusteeship now imposed upon him. Calmly, serenely, steadfastly as ever the priest went his priestly way, fulfilling his daily parochial duties as he had year in and year out—calmly and serenely awaiting the event of it. And out of the inscrutable unknownness

of the world unseen came there a mandate to the priest confirming his resolution and anointing it with the grace of the dead Felicia's appeal, as night after night in his dreams and in his midnight hours of wakefulness the face of Felicia appeared before him piteously and strickenly beseeching, with her white hands shielding her abashed eyes, mutely imploring him—her priest, her dear companion, her sympathizer, her one most steadfast and unflinching friend, her lifelong self-denying and ever dependable adorer—to avenge not so much her murder as the dishonor that Juror Craddenfield had publicised to all the horrified world. And Father Leon was ready. Night after night the vision confronted him, and day after day he bore it ever before him and calmly went his tranquil, ever-forceful, priestly way, resolute, simply waiting, self-dedicated even to the extremity of his days. Then came the stunning information of the escape of Hemperton, and with it the instant mandatory summons to him, the vicar, to go. And go he would, and did. Without undue deliberation, without haste, with only the simplest preparation, without alarm or confidences, but quite as a matter of course—with the appealing vision of Felicia ever-present before him—he set out to find Hemperton—and to avenge. He knew that until he should confront the fugitive, peace would be with him never in all his life again. He knew that he had been faithful to his own manhood, his priesthood and to his consecrated adoration of her in her lifetime, so must he and so would he be to this supreme obligation that his love for her demanded of him, to avenge her in so far as human action could.

The priest conjectured that probably the fugitive.

would make for Mexico, and by steamer from San Pedro if he could, but consulting the dates of departure he at once satisfied himself that Hemperton would not run the chances of waiting around a little seaport during the two days delay that would be necessary before a steamer should leave, no matter how complete his disguise. Nor would he go north to San Francisco. The most promising avenue for escape was the way through Arizona, thence across the line to the mountain fastnesses and interior towns of the lower republic.

The priest thought Hemperton would scarcely be so foolhardy as to travel in an ordinary passenger train. It was more probable that he would work his way eastward on freights and thus avoid the observation that would be almost inevitable in ordinary cars. How or when he might come upon him the priest wasted little time in imagining, but he was serenely confident that meet they would. He was not sensible of being in much of a hurry. Through all the dedalous and uncertain complexity of time and distance and disguises and untoward circumstance, justice would pick its inflexible and undefeatable way. His own instinct and determination, his own intent thinking upon it, the providence of God, would direct him and lead them together; he had only to go on and on and keep going on and obey that imperative impulse, and be ever vigilant and unrelaxing.

In an Arizona town he stopped for a day and purchased coarser clothing. He went into his room at evening clad in the black of a priest of Rome. Long after midnight as he crossed the dusty space to the east-bound train one would have thought him

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a prospector or a stock man. From that night he shaved no more.

At the end of thirty days the priest had reached the City of Mexico. More than two weeks of the interim he had spent in large and small cities and towns in the northern part of the republic haunting the railway stations and the highways. He assumed that Hemperton's disguise would be difficult for any but himself to penetrate, but he relied upon his own discernment to detect that peculiar leveling of the eyes and a certain mannerism in the movement of Hemperton's right arm to identify him anywhere, even twenty years hence. Once in Calientes the priest thought for a moment that the fugitive was sauntering along a bank of the canal, but it was not Hemperton. Father Leon reasoned that probably Hemperton would hasten to the City of Mexico where he could consider himself comparatively safe for some time. More weeks went by, but Father Leon remained in the capital, patiently, indefatigably going up and down in the most frequented thoroughfares, and through many of the lesser as well, relentless, undiscouraged—seeking. Not for an instant did he doubt that somewhere, somehow, sometime he would encounter him. Believing in the sacredness of his mission, morning and evening he invoked divine protection and assistance and unquestioningly he believed Divinity itself was directing him. The impelling vision of the face of Felicia and the eye-shielding hands ceased not to appear unto him, and the conviction abided with him that until he had confronted Hemperton and had done the vengeance committed to him to do the vision of that face would be ever present, mandating and reproaching since

no other than himself remained to do what he had undertaken.

One afternoon as Father Leon was departing from the cathedral of Mexico, whither he often went for a submersion of solitude and prayer, he felt a doubtful hand upon his arm.

"Senor, pardon! But have you not a brother or near relative in the Pueblo de Los Angeles?"

The priest turned. "Why do you ask?" said he, recognizing that instant Pedro Estevero, a former parishioner.

"Pardon, senor! But you are very like the good Father Leon, where formerly I lived."

"Pedro Estevero, I am Father Leon; but I am traveling for absolute rest and I do not wish to be known as a priest."

"It is I, father. How fine of you to remember me—even my name!"

"Why are you here, Pedro?"

"I came to southern Mexico long ago, Father Leon, in charge of a camp for a mining company, after the railroad was built through Arizona. Soon I am going back to the mines, father, where I have long been."

The priest remembered Pedro as having dwelt first at San Fernando and afterward in the pueblo, until Pedro went with the constructing forces into Arizona.

"Father, I saw a man a few weeks ago that I think I saw years ago. I cannot think his name. Do you know is any American from the pueblo here?"

"How did this man appear, Pedro?"

"Much like a miner, father; very brown, with coarse clothes and heavy boots."

"Had he a beard, Pedro?"

Pedro reflected. "No, father, he had no beard."

"Did you note the color of his hair and eyes, my son?"

"Dark, father, almost as black as our men."

"Where did you see him, Pedro?"

"At the little house where I stopped. It is a place for men from the mountains. Americans do not many times go there. I saw him as he was about to ride away. I heard him ask the way to Quexlac, which is a village thirty miles southeast from the capital."

The priest could not name the man from this description.

Pedro said he was to go back to the mountains in a few days, a long way from the capital. He came to the city only once a year. Delighted and flattered by the priest's swift remembrance, Pedro said "adios," and the priest went to make inquiry as to the way to reach Quexlac. He outfitted with still rougher garments, and with the great peaked sombrero of the country, and purchased an animal fitted for mountain travel.

He reached the hamlet of Quexlac, high upon a mountain side, toward the following evening, and while watering his animal and inquiring after accommodations for the night he casually asked if Americans ever penetrated hither. Rarely, he was told. Had any come that way within a month?

None was remembered. Yes, it was recalled, an American had passed, perhaps a few weeks before to look into mines farther on.

The next village was twenty miles across the pass, they told him. Would he not better remain till

morning? Yes, he would sleep that night in the mountain hamlet; and he thought, as he dreamed, that the face of Felicia seemed to smile, below where the hands still hid the eyes; and the priest interpreted that he was being encouraged.

But not the following day, nor the day after, nor for many days did he find Hemperton; though an American clad as a miner, with black hair and stubby beard, had gone before—always some weeks ago—and Father Leon was still content.

He was in no haste, save that the vision of Felicia, with those white hands pressed upon her eyes, bade him ever on and on and on.

In the thickening dust he rode wearily up to a thin stream that sang its song of mountain solitude to the half Mexicans, half Aztecs who dwelt in the dozen or more adobes clustered beside it, and asked for shelter and food. Both were offered and directly after refreshments of fruit, mescal and tortillas he retired for the night. It might have been an hour, or perhaps two or three, when he was awakened by harsh voices in an adjoining room. The door between was but a curtain of cattle hides.

To be thus disturbed when he was so weary annoyed him. He hoped the conversation would cease that he might slumber again. He intended to proceed on the following morning. But the voices did not cease. On the contrary they were loud and disputatious, and the Spanish of one was imperfect and sometimes hesitating, and the voice that spoke it was so familiar that the priest almost ceased to respire for the very intentness of his listening.

It was he! *He!* At last!

No more fatigue, and no more slumber while that

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voice might continue to ring its identifying tones into his eager ears. The priest half arose in bed, and made a trumpet of his palm to catch every syllable and intonation. It was *he*! The priest was as positive as if Hemperton were standing there beside him.

The voices were angry, one insisting that he whom the priest knew to be the man he had hunted through two thousand miles should stay away from what the priest gathered to be some kind of mine, until payment had been made.

"It is my property," declared the man, "and it is worth much money, and you shall go upon it to work no more until you have paid."

"I will pay," replied the familiar voice, "when I have satisfied myself."

"You said many days ago that you were satisfied. You mean to deceive me. You shall go there no more. I have heard that you Americans are that way. You would take all. You would give nothing. It shall not be so with me. You will pay or you shall keep away, or I will kill you. You shall deceive me no more!"

"You fool! I am not deceiving you. I must know what I am doing."

"You know already. You have said!"

And thus the wrangle continued for some minutes, when the unfamiliar voice went away, still angry and dissatisfied.

Then the priest heard the other man stir a little, and presently the dim light that shone faintly over and under the screen of hides was extinguished and the man lay down.

Not then, not there, where the sound of the speech

that must pass between them would attract interference. Not then, not there, but in a solitude somewhere unseen, only themselves and—the wildness. Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps later, he knew not. But he had found him, and the priest could have slept more contentedly than since Hemperton's flight if he could have slept at all.

All night he lay with unclosed eyes, thinking not what he would say, what he would do nor how he would do it. His resolution was too fixed to need a program that the event itself would suggest. As the night wore on he thought only of Felicia and saw only the face of her with the hands still hiding her eyes. Soon after daylight he heard the man behind the cattle-hide curtain stir, and then go out. The priest arose and dressed and peered up and down the single narrow street, along one side of which ran the mountain stream. He would wait. Perhaps the man would go to the place that had caused the dispute, then he would inquire the way and follow. His long journey in sun and wind had browned his face and hands, and his beard was bushy but not long. By and by some one came to ask if he would come out and eat. Was the man who had the room adjoining his to breakfast with him or had he gone? The American had gone to his mine. The priest stepped out to bathe his face in the stream, and made a meal of milk and tortillas. Afterward he asked if the American who had slept in the other room had been long in the place. Several weeks, he was told. What had he been doing? Learning about an ancient mine, they thought, a mine that had supplied much gold for Montezuma palaces before the Spaniards came, but it had been

idle for centuries. While in the capital the American had been told of it and had come to see. Every day he rode to the place, over there around the knob of granite. Was it far? Perhaps five miles. He was looking for a mine himself; were there others? Yes, more beyond where the American was at work.

Being a Spaniard and speaking their language, and by his appearance a man of some consequence, the priest was greeted friendlyly as he leisurely strolled up the road and back, and presently he went to the place where his animal had been stabled. He saddled it, and started on the road to the ancient mine that had yielded Montezuman gold.

The day was growing hot in the narrow gorge shut in by lofty mountains, and the road or rather the trail was rough and dusty. The priest rode calmly on, with never a plan of what to say, nor how, simply an appointed instrumentality to do that which had not been done, but must be.

Half an hour later the trail abruptly descended and beyond he saw that it disappeared behind a granite pile. He proposed to take no chances. He drew a weapon from his hip and held it behind the horn of his saddle, as he turned the granite. Just ahead, on a cleared space, under shade of a tree was a pack mule, but no human was in sight. He tied his animal to the tree, and followed a foot-path that led to a small opening in the mountain—a miner's work, he thought, with marks of a man having been there. The priest seated himself with his back to a great stone facing the hole in the mountain side—and waited.

When the sun was nearly overhead a man stepped from the tunnel not ten paces from the priest and

moved toward the shade, then halted as he saw another animal and looked inquiringly around. While the man's face was still toward the shade the priest arose.

Hemperton turned to see this strange bearded person, with the attire and face of a Latin, confronting him.

The priest perceived that he was not recognized, but Hemperton was startled.

"Wayne Hemperton, you seem not to know me! Yet I should need no identification to you."

The brown of Hemperton's countenance was as coppery as an Aztec idol, but at the pronouncement of his name in this sequestered Mexican canyon there was no more tan of sun and wind, there was only the pallor of a hunted and smitten soul; a man, however, who feared no other.

"Who are you?" defiantly approaching with weapon reached for.

"I am Ferdinand Orvella," replied the priest with weapon already raised.

"By God, sir priest, you are still as much a meddler as ever!"

"I am no priest, Wayne Hemperton, until I have done with you! I am only Ferdinand Orvella—man!"

Combat, ever welcome to Hemperton, fired his senses and his wits, and being at bay as he knew he was, the whiteness fled from his face, and the look of the fighter came into his eyes and the flush of the fighter bronzed his cheek.

"I have the honor, Ferdinand Orvella, to compliment you upon the sagacity with which you have followed me."

"The power resided not in me, Wayne Hemperton—but there!" with left hand uplifted.

Hemperton's lip curled, which the priest could not plainly see for the beard, and the eye shot contempt, which the priest saw.

"Throw your weapon away and I will lower mine," said the priest.

"I will not."

"As you please."

"Well, why are you here, Ferdinand Orvella, as you call yourself?"

"I am here, Wayne Hemperton, as you call yourself—Jasper Crenningway that you are—to do that which the appointed instruments of the public will have failed to do. But I would know first of all the one unfathomable thing—why did you ever woo at Don Sagasto's while having yet a wife?"

"Priest, I should not please you by answering, but I will! I believed the other to be dead."

"Believed! Had you ever undertaken to know? Had you reason to believe?"

"You shall not catechise me, Ferdinand Orvella, though you find me with my back to the wall. I have said all that I shall say. Have you come with a purpose to take me back?" contempt and defiance leaping from his eyes.

"No, Jasper Crenningway, I have not come to take you, nor shall any other do that. I have come to look for once and all, to see what manner of monstrous thing I have been friend with all the years and yet knew it not, nor once suspected. I have come, Jasper Crenningway, not to reproach nor to catechise! I have come to satisfy my eyes and my senses that the Wayne Hemperton with whom I

have been a steadfast and admiring friend was not, after all, an incarnate shape housing an incarnate fiend, but only that supreme and inscrutable human paradox, a fiend incarnate lodged in the very seemly frame of a man!"

Both heard a crackle in the brush on the mountain above them, but neither ceased to regard the other with fixed and fearless eyes.

"I come, Jasper Crenningway, to impose retributive justice for some, and avenging justice for one who shall be nameless—an avenging justice that no law could ever inflict; for all the courts of justice under God's blue sky would be impotent to impose retributive or fit chastisement for dishonor so horrifying—so pitiless—so unprovoked! I am come, Jasper Crenningway, to obtain for others that which none but myself remains to compel."

They had approached within a few paces. The lines in their faces were rigid as hewn oak, and the eyes of Jasper Crenningway were piercing and gleaming as points of burnished steel. All the brain and all the human love of life in him were whetted under the resolution he read in the priest's steady and accusing eyes to circumvent that inflexible purpose, to divert him for even a single instant, to gain a vantage.

As well as if the priest had said it, Jasper Crenningway understood, when Father Leon had revealed himself, that not both could depart from the secluded spot. The priest had surprised him. Weeks ago the fugitive had believed himself safe for the remainder of his life. It was akin to a miracle that the priest had tracked him, but Jasper Crenningway did not believe in miracles. Yet miracle or providence

or chance, there stood Father Leon before him. And the unfaltering tenacity which Crenningway read in those pitiless eyes would have swept away every obligation of his priestly office, Crenningway comprehended—though the billows of his adoration for Felicia had hurled themselves in vain against his vows and priesthood for many years—and sent him unhesitating and unregreting forth upon this avenging quest and man-hunt till the crack of doom but the priest would find him; the sacrifice of the vows to which not even the tempestuous love of his youth had compelled him, the sublimated adoration of his middle manhood and his accepted mission of avenger had without an hour of combat achieved. There stood the priest unfrocked, not for love but for retribution; to be a priest no more until the sacred and dishonored deed were rejustified in the one way possible to human instrumentality.

Jasper Crenningway understood but quavered not. Wholly unaffrighted the fighter in him faced with those leveled and defying and still contemptuous eyes that embodiment of undivertible purpose. Through the priest's resolute eyes and fixed but unwrathful countenance blazed not anger but the unsatisfied and determined personality of justice, and expressed the mournful appeal of the murdered and dishonored woman, the final outcry of the proud, confiding, humiliated and circumvented don.

Neither the priest nor Hemperton dared lift his eyes toward the underbrush that crackled again.

"Well, Ferdinand Orvella, I am ready to fight you, with knives, lashed arm to arm or with these," shaking his weapon, "five paces apart!"

"I will fight not such as you, Jasper Crenningway;

that were to concede manhood in the most unmanly heart that ever throbbed; that were to dignify your cowardly life with honorable ending!"

"By God, you priestly hypocrite! Have you come intending to murder, then?" exclaimed Crenningway, half raising his weapon, not paling, but his face swelling with fury and with the fighting blood of the animal driven to corner.

"Not murder, but execution of the circumvented law, Jasper Crenningway!"

"Coward and canter, as well as hypocrite!" exclaimed Crenningway, tortured out of that habitual self-command by the portentous solemnity and granitic resolution of the priest, "I will make you fight me, willing or not!" And, with the aim of Father Leon straight and sure at his breast, Crenningway raised his arm to fire; but a crack and a puff from the brush above the tunnel sent an interposing messenger before his or the priest's, and Jasper Crenningway slowly turned to the ambushed enemy a face like the white dust at his feet—and it was the end.

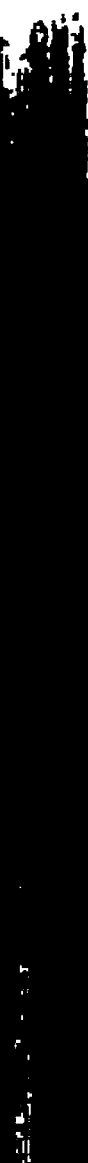
Then Father Leon bared his head to the heat and the solitude, and with eyes uplifted to the burnished sky his lips uttered an inaudible "Felicia!" and upon his breast he made the obsecrating sign of the cross.

And never again were the dreams of him troubled by the vision of the white and appealing face of her, with hands defending her eyes.

And afterward, while another royal pageant of a Southern California Christmas sun cleft its royal progress across a Christmassky of nuptial blue, and scattered

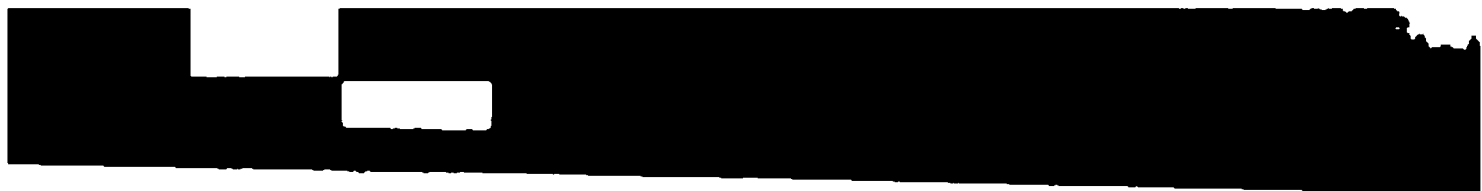
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again its largesses of reincarnating summery warmth upon a winter's face of fructifying green, Constancia, radiant niece of the honored and unforgotten don, clinging to the arm of rosy and youthful-hearted old Judge Brecknell, moved through an aisle of ferns in the embowered patio to the high altar of the live-oak, before Father Leon, to put her hand in the hand of Marston Pollock; and together they walked hand-in-hand in Felicia's rose garden, and sat in the proud old don's great chair on the veranda, and lifted their faces to the west where the Christmas sun flung high and wide the gold and cardinal signal-splendors of his Christmas good-night.













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